TREE SYMBOL WORSHIP IN INDIA

Edited, and with an Introduction by Sankar Sen Gupta

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TREE SYMBOL WORSHIP IN INDIA

BY SANKAR SEN GUPTA

Folklorists of Bengal

ALSO EDITED BY SANKAR SEN GUPTA

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TREE SYMBOL WORSHIP IN INDIA

A new survey of a pattern of folk-religion

Foreword : Sri Prafullachandra Sen
Preface : Madame Sophia Wadia

Edited with an introduction by Sankar Sen Gupta

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CHIEF MINISTER
WEST BENGAL

Calcutta,
July 5, 1965.

FOREWORD

I welcome the publication of the book "Tree Symbol Worship in India" to which I add this foreword with pleasure.

Tree worship in India is based on scientific observations and most of it is not myth. What we adore and admire we protect and propagate. If we recognise the fact that when we plant a tree we sow the seed of our future. A tree means so much in our life ; tree is life itself.

I am glad the authors of various articles in this book have been able to sort out a good deal of what is science and the rest which is well-founded faith.

I am sure this book will be read with interest and the Publishers' efforts will be acknowledged.

Prafullachandra Sen.

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President :- Madame Sophia Wadia

PREFACE

I welcome the publication of this volume, which includes articles on the symbol of the tree and its use in different forms of worship. The tree is one of the oldest symbols and has from the remotest antiquity been associated with the gods and mystical forces in nature. We find it in the mythologies and popular legends of all peoples. Every nation has had—or still has—its own special tree, its sacred tree embodying characteristics peculiar to its own culture and genius. This is strikingly true of India, where the Sacred Banyan Tree is associated with Vishnu and is called the tree of knowledge and the tree of life. Of the banyan it is said : "Under the protecting foliage of this king of the forest, the *gurus* teach their pupils their first lessons on immortality and initiate them into the mysteries of life and death" * and we have also the Bo-tree, pipal or *ficus religiosa* sacred to the memory of Lord Buddha, who reached Enlightenment under its shade. It is a fascinating study to travel in thought and imagination to distant lands from Scandinavia to Mexico, and from Egypt to Peru, and trace the history of this living and universal symbol, the Tree. But it would require more than one volume to cover the meaning of all these sacred trees, the reverence for some of which has survived to this day. We are grateful to the authors who have contributed to this present book and shown us the many facets of the worship of the tree in our India. May their contributions help us to realize unity in diversity and enhance in us reverence for all life.

Sophia Wadia

Bombay,
Buddha Purnima, 1965.

* *The Secret Doctrine* by H. P. Blavatsky, Vol. II, p. 215.

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SANKAR SEN GUPTA

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

A *tree,* says the dictionary, is a "woody perennial plant having a single main stream of trunk (as distinguished from a single main root), commonly exceeding 10 ft. in height, and usually bearing a head of branches and foliage, or a crown of leaves at the summit."

Most trees can be arranged into three groups, (1) coniferous, typically cone-bearing, needle-leafed or scale-leafed, usually tall and slender and generally retaining their leaves throughout the year, (2) broad-leafed trees usually lower and with branches more widespread than the coniferous, infinitely various in fruit and flowers, and in temperate climates usually deciduous (shedding their leaves at the approach of winter), (3) palms.

The oldest and longest living things on the earth are to be found among the trees. The tree is the oldest creation of God. It renders indispensable service to the land itself. It ranks with grasses as the defender of the soil against the encroachment of the sea and against floods. In wooded regions the temperature is more equable and the atmosphere is more moisterous than in tree-less regions. The long roots of trees enable them to tap underground water sources inaccessible to vegetation with roots near the surface, and the foliage of a large tree gives out enormous amount of moisture.

Most of the nations have now realised the importance of creating forests. Tree-consciousness in India is as old as her people and this tradition has been honoured by the Republic of India in introducing *Vanmahotasab.* It is said in *Padmapuran* :

अनेन विधिना षस्तु कुर्षाद वृक्षोत्सवं मुदा ।
सर्वान कामानवाप्नोतु तत् तदानन्त्यमन्न ते ॥
यश्चैकमपि राजेन्द्र वृक्षं संस्थापयेद बुधः ।
सोपि स्वर्गे-वसेद राजन यावदिन्द्रशतत्रयम ॥ (सृष्टि २१अ)

Plants may be classified into four groups : (i) Thallophyte including bacteria, algae, fungi, (ii) Bryophyta including liver and mosses, (iii) Pteridophyta including ferns, horse tails, culb noses, (iv)

Earmaphyta or seed-producing plants. It is believed that plants have evolved from *algae* group. They are water-dwellers as a rule, though some live in moist places in the open air. The redness of the Red Sea is caused by the tiny forms of *algae,* and so the "red snow" reported by Arctic explorers. The word *algae* is Latin (singular alga). They have no leaves or flowers and often no parts which might be taken for stems or roots. Many are microscopic, some consisting of one tiny cell. Others are large sea-weeds. One can tell that they are plants because they all, even the red or brown ones, contain the green substance, chlorophyll, which is in leaves, and manufacture their foods from chemically simple substance like, carbondioxide, nitrates and so on.

The food plants provide the world with textile fibres, timber, paper, drugs, oils and materials for soap-making. About one-fifth of the world's plant-growing area is covered with forest. Long ago there was much more, but it has been dwindling for many hundred years.

Man found the soil of forests to be often richer than that of open lands, and cut down trees to make room for crops or for grazing animals and later for mining, factories and towns. The results are serious. As said by an *Adibasi* (tribal) leader—"Adibasis call their jungle their home. Today the jungle is no longer theirs. In the name of cultivation of forest, they are kept out of the forests but the contractor has better use of it.

"I remember, many years ago one important Cabinet Minister in the State, (Bihar) said, ". . . . . *Ham Jungle ura denge tab kidhar se hoga Jharkhand. Sal jungle katwa dange.* (I will destroy the forests of *sal.* Then how will you form a Jharkhand ? All the forests will be cut down). Well, it is having a very very disastrous impact on the *Adibasi* people because while they were found to go in and out they were able to live in jungle and forests. Today they have no longer to do that."[1]

The Indian sages believed

"तमसा वहुरूपेण वेष्टिताः कर्महेतुना ।
अन्तःसंज्ञा भरन्त्येते सुखदुःख समन्विताः ॥ (मनु, १म)

so they behaved with the trees like a near relation :

"अरण्यान्यरण्यान्यसौ या प्रेव नश्यसि ।
कथा ग्रामं न पृच्छसि न त्वा भीरिव विंदती ॥
(ऋग्वेद, १०।१४६।१)

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1. Role of Anthropology in National reconstruction by Jaipal Singh. Indian Journal of Social Work, Vol. VII, No. 1 & 2, pp. 11.

It is well-known that agriculture began when men selected those particular wild plants which are rich in food value, sowed their seeds and protected the growing plants in his fields and gardens. Removed from the dangers and struggles for existence, these plants have been able to devote more and more energy to the business of making and storing food. Thus cultivated wheat, which was once a wild grass, has developed the nice seeds and now gives the world its flour. The process of evolution is further speeded up when men carefully selected their seeds for each successive crop.

All this has been said about the usefulness of trees and plants in the human society. From this usefulness and the points discussed by the respective contributors the various form of tree-worship developed in the old times. The conceptions of tree-worship generally fall into two classes, (1) the tree-god, whose worship became organised into a definite religion. (2) tree-demons or tree-spirits, whose propitiation degraded the level of sorcery and incantation. To define the relation between these two conceptions is extremely difficult. It has been approached by different writers along in two major lines of thought. (i) Either gods were developed from spiritual forces assumed by primitive man to be inherent in nature, and gradually differentiated from the less friendly powers embodied in the various demons, until they came to be regarded as the kinsmen and ancestors of their worshippers or (ii) they were ancestral spirits, at once feared and trusted from their very origin by their kinsmen, whilst all the rest of minor spirits and demons were degenerate gods or the ancestral spirit enemies.

As man's conception of the deity became more definitely anthropomorphic on the one hand and less local on the other, this primitive representation of the god in the tree underwent a change again in two directions : (1) In one case an attempt was made to express more clearly the man-like form of the god ; the tree was dressed or carved in human semblance, or a mask or statue of the god was hung upon or placed beside it. (2) The god widened his territory or absorbed other local gods. He became associated with the trees of a certain class, and was assumed to dwell in a particular kind of tree, which thenceforward became sacred to and symbolical of Him.

The worship of tree was not the only earliest form of divine ritual, but was the last to disappear in the West before the spread of Christianity ; it existed long before the erection of temples and statues to the gods, flourished side by side with them, and persisted long after they had disappeared. The influence of tree is still traceable in the Chris-

tian religion if one cares to look at the *Christmas tree.*[2] R. Folkard writes about the Garos, an Assamese tribe in India, they " . . . . possess neither temples nor altar, set up a bamboo before their huts, and sacrifice before it to their deity."[3]

E. B. Tylor, with greater caution, concludes that *direct and absolute tree-worship* may lie very wide and deep in the early history of religion, but that apart from this "there is a wide range of animistic conception connected with tree and forest worship. The tree may be the spirit of perch, or shelter or favourite haunt ; or may serve as a scaffold or alter, where offerings can be set out for some spiritual being ; or its shelter may be a place of worship set apart by nature, of some tribes the only temple, of many tribes, perhaps, the earliest ; or lastly, it may be merely a sacred object patronised by, or associated with, or symbolising some divinity." (Primitive Culture, London, 1913),

The nature of relation between man and tree was founded on the solid rock of religion. Everything was thus sanctified on the altar of religion. Let us see some relevant evidence which are to the point and corroborate the growth of tree-symbol worship and bring to light human ideas and thoughts on tree from different sources.

J. H. Philpot pointed out, (i) "In St. Mark's at Venice, there are embeded in the walls, high above one's head, a number of ancient sculptured slabs, on each of which a conventionalised plant, with foliage most truthfully and lovingly rendered, is set between two fulsome monsters, as fantastic and impossible as any supporters to be met with

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2. The Christmas tree seems a comparatively recent development, a German custom spreading elsewhere in the past century and a half, and is perhaps a parallel to the May-tree, which is of much older tradition. On Christmas Eve the tree is decorated with tinsel and lights ; beneath or on the branches of the tree are the gifts for the children and the rest of the family ; atop the tree is the star of Bethlehem or a heralding angel. . . . . The evergreen tree (sometimes a branch only) is kept through the festival season and is not discarded until after Twelfth Night. The Yulelog, a huge piece of wood, is in some places burned a little during each of the twelve days of the season . . . . . In parts of France it is believed that a piece of the Yule log, if kept safe during the year, will protect the house against fire and lightening, will ensure bountiful crops . . . . The mistletoe connected with the magic Oak of the Celtic lands, is suspended. Traditionally the girl who stands under it may be kissed by a boy of the company willynilly, usually the former.

An English belief is that the Sun shining through the fruit trees on Christmas Day will bring much fruit. (Folklore Dictionary, Mythology and Legends Ed. by M. Leach., p. 230).

3. Plantlore, legends and lyrics, by R. Folkard, London, 1882,

in the whole range of heraldry. To an ordinary observer, these strange sculpture say nothing. But the student of oriental art at once detects in them a familiar design, a design whose pedigree can be traced back to the day six thousand years ago when the Chaldean Semites were taking their culture and religion from the old Accadians. In the central part of this design one recognises a symbol or ideograph of a divine attribute or activity, if not a representation of a visible embodiment or abode of a god. The design was probably handed on from Assyria to Persia and from Persia to Byzantium, and so to Venice. . . . (ii) What is probably the earliest record of tree is met with on the engraved cylinder of Chaldea, 'some of which date back to 4000 B. C.' Even at that period it would appear that the Chaldean had advanced beyond the stage of crude tree-worship as is found to day *amongst some tribes,* for the sacred tree had already undergone a process of idolisation. And it is probable that by a similar process of idolisation a conventional representation of the sacred tree came to be the most important symbols of Chaldean religion." This symbol (St. Mark's) appears on the oldest Chaldean cylinders as a stem divided at the base, surmounted by a fork or a crescent, and cut, midway, by "one or more cross bars which sometimes bear a fruit at each extremity. This rudimentary image frequently changes into palm, the pomegranate, the cypress, vine etc."[5]

(iii) Quintus Curtius in his *De Gestis Alexander* writes that the companions of Alexander the Great noticed that the Indians "reputed as gods whatever they held in reverence, especially trees, which it was death to injure". This ancient reverence for trees was recognised by Buddhism and adapted to its more advanced mode of thought.

We know from *Mythologie des Plants* that "in the seventeenth century there existed near Surat a sacred banyan tree, supposed to be 3000 years old, which the Hindus would never cut or touch with steel for fear of offending the god concealed in its foliage. They made pilgrimages to it and honoured it with religious ceremonies. On its trunk at a little distance from the ground a head had been roughly carved, painted in gay colours, and furnished with gold and silver eyes. The simulacum was constantly adorned with fresh foliage and flowers, the withered leaves which they replaced being distributed amongst the pilgrims as pious souvenirs". The students of art and archaeology are aware of the fact "on coins and other works of art the god is frequently represented with oak-leaves or as standing or sitting beside an oak-tree"[6]

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5. The Migration of symbols by Goblet d'Alvide, London, 1894.
6. The Sacred Tree by J. H. Philpot, London, 1897, p. 35-36.

(iv) In India each Buddha was associated with his own Bodhi tree or tree of wisdom. The trumpet-flower, the *Sal* tree, the acacia, the pipala, the banyan—all belonged to different Buddhas, and are so depicted on the *stupa* of *Bharhut*. Here in the case of the earliest of the Buddhas whose Bodhi tree has been found, the Duddha Vipasin, the particular tree represented is the *Patali* or trumpet-flower. In front of it is placed "a throne or *bodhimanda,* before which two people are kneeling, whilst a crowd of others with joined hands are standing on each side of the tree."[7] The *Sanchi* and *Amaravati* sculptures contain representation of the sacred tree, decorated with garlands and surrounded by votaries. The Buddha Gautama's tree was pipal or *Ficus religiosa* which is more elaborately treated at *Bharhut* than any other Bodhi tree. In the sculpture representing its adoration "the trunk is entirely surrounded by an open pillared building with an upper storey, ornamented with niches containing umbrellas. Two umbrellas are placed in the top of the tree, and streamers are hanging from the branches. In the two upper corners are flying figures of garlands. On each side there is a male figure raising a garland in his right hand and holding the tip of his tongue with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand. In the lower storey of the building is a throne in front of a tree. Two figures, male and female, are kneeling before the throne, while a female figure is standing to the left, and a Naga Raja with his hands crossed on his breast to the right. This figure is distinguished by a triple serpent crest. To the extreme right there is an isolated pillar surmounted by an elephant holding out a garland in his trunk. On the domed roof of the building is inscribed 'The Bodhi-Tree' of Buddha Sakya Muni."[8] At a later date the tree appears to have lost its organic connection with the venerated personage, and to have preserved only ceremonial symbolic significance, for the Bo-tree, under which truth gradually unfolded itself to the mediating Gautama, is regarded by Buddhists in much the same way as the cross by the Christians and shrines by the Hindus.

(v) The folklore of Europe and America which presents the observance with which Christmas, *May Day*[9] and the gathering of the

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7. The Stupa of Bharhut, by A. Cunningham London, 1879.

8. Ibid, A. Cunningham.

9. The first day of May is observed as Spring festival everywhere in Europe, the United States and Canada, and as a labour festival in certain European countries. The typical European May Day celebration includes—(1) the gathering of green branches and flowers on May Eve or very early on May Day morning, (2) the choosing and crowning of a May queen (often also a king) among the young people, who go singing from door to door through the village, carrying flowers or the May tree, soliciting donation for a merry-making in return for the "blessing for May." (3) the

harvest are still celebrated, is all permeated by the primitive idea that there was a spiritual essence embodied in vegetation, that trees like men, had spirits, passing in and out amongst them, which possessed a mysterious potent influence over human affairs.

(vi) The Old Testament presents a drama of supposing interest, a record of internecine struggle between the aspiration of the few towards the worship of a single, omnipresent unconditioned God and the conservative adhesion of many to the primitive ritual and belief common to all Semetic tribes.[10]

(vii) Tree-worship also played a vital part in the religion of Greece and Rome. The subject has been exhaustively treated by Carl Bothicher in his *Des Baumkultus des Hellenen,* Berlin, 1856 and then by L. R. Farnell in his "The Cult of the Greek States", Oxford, 1896.

(viii) In ancient Germany, the universal ceremonial religion of the people had its abode in the "grove" and the earliest effort of the Christian Missionaries were directed towards the destruction of these venerated woods, or their consecration by the erection within them a Christian edifice. (Jacob Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie, Gottingen,* 1844) Some of these wood-inhabiting spirits were favourable to man, ready to befriend, helped him in difficulty ; others were malicious and vindictive. The whole subject has been studied in Germany with characteristic thoroughness.

(ix) In France at Massilia (Marseilles) human sacrifices were in primitive times offered to trees (Lucan, Pharsalia). In South France they have a graceful festival, in which the spirit of vegetation is personified by a youth clad in green, who feigning sleep is awakened by a maiden's kiss.

(x) In Japan some old trees growing near Shinto temples are regarded as sacred. Similar system is current in India as has been described by Samir Ghosal in his essay. The legends of Tree spirit has been given by Dr. R. M. Dorson in his book 'Folk Legends of Japan' in a characteristic manner.

(xi) There is very little evidence of tree-worship in China, though

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cutting, setting up, decorating of the May tree (bush, pole) and the dance around it. . . . . .

The going out and picking of flowers and branches and bringing them home is the symbolic act of bringing home the May, i.e., bringing new life, the Spring, into village (See Frazer, Magic Art, ii, London, 1891' p. 59). . . . . And all the symbolic figures in the little drama, the boy and girl, the tree, the flowers, were believed to embody, and hence to have the power to bestow new life and fertility on crops, cattle, women. (Folklore Dictionary : Mythology and Legend, New York, 1950, p. 695).

10. The Sacred Tree by J. H. Philpot, London, 1897, p. 3.

the Chinese have a tradition of tree-life, and a drink of immorality is made from various sacred plants.

(xii) It is well-known that *Artemis* was not primarily a goddess of chase and of the moon, nor the twin-sister of Apollo, identified with the Roman *Diana* but an idependent divinity, closely related to the wood-nymphs, and connected with water and with wild vegetation and forest beasts. She was worshipped in *Arcadia* (Modern Greek Ar. Ka. dhi. a) as the goddess of the nut-tree and the Cedar, and in Laconia as the goddess of laurel and the myrtle.

(xiii) *Hera,* the sister and consort of Zeus, later the queen of heaven is said to have been born under a willow-tree at Samos, and her worship in that island was characterised by a yearly ceremony in which her priestess secreted her idol in a willow bark. When it was subsequently rediscovered it was honoured with an oblation of cakes.

(xiv) *Aphrodite,* the daughter of Zeus and Diana and the goddess of love and beauty was not a primitive Greek deity, but her connection with vegetative life is abundantly clear.

(xv) In Egypt *Osiris,* their god of vegetation, has his origin in a tree as also *Adonis,* youth beloved by Venus for his beauty. In Syria and Attis a vegetation-god worshipped with Great Mother in Phrygia, an ancient country in Asia Minor. The ancient Egyptian monuments depict his dead body as enclosed in a tree, and tradition fostered a ceremony in which a pine tree was cut down and the centre hollowed out into a hole in which an image of Osiris was placed—a remarkably clear expression, as Frazer points out, the idea that a tree is tenanted by a personal being.

The Egyptians considered big trees to be divine and animated with goddesses who were pleased to manifest themselves so that their heads and even their whole bodies would emerge from the trunk of tree, then re-enter it, becoming re-absorbed or, according to the Egyptian expression, the trunk *ate* them again. These tree goddesses, known as *Hathor, Nuit, Salkit* and *Nit* were believed to provide nourishment for their devotees on earth, and Egyptian vases represent them as bending over and pouring out water from a vessel and milk from their crests (For the Sycamore fit, when cut, produces a milky fluid). When we look at Egyptian Sycamore fed by underground waters of the Nile we understand scientifically what they understood transcendentally.

(xvi) In Northern Europe again, we see Thor associated with the rowan who lunched on berries in Autumn still astonish us like flaming flowers, and then considered holy and sacred to the Finns. We see *Ukho* (thunder god) and *Taara* and *Balder,* all taking their origin from the Oak. We also see the sacred Upsala dedicated to Wooden, the god

who after hanging nine nights on the gallows descended to the underworld and brought back the prize of wisdom.

(xvii) We turn to Arabia where the Goddess *Al-Ozza* received through her sacred acacia offerings of eggs ; to Mexico where the god *Huitbilopochtli* at the Feast of Teteionan was placated by the head of a woman whose flayed skin was draped down a naked youth ; to Persia where *Ormuzd,* the creator of the world speaking to Zoroaster, the traditional founder of the ancient Persian religion says—'Go O Zoroaster, to the living trees, and let thy mouth speak before them these words—*I pray to pure trees, the creatures of Ormuzd*' ; to France where at Marseilles, in primitive times, human sacrifice was made to trees ; the sacred trees of Japan bound with fillets of straw rope in acknowledgment of their tenancy by divine spirit ; to the enormously widespread ceremonial worship in groves by the people of ancient Germany. From one end of the world to the other we trace the unexampled power of trees over the minds of the humanities.

(xviii) In Ceylon the conception *of Bo tree* as the Buddha is more advanced, it is less a question of a god-in-a-tree than a tree of enlightenment. It was the tree that bestowed wisdom. Gautama, the great philosopher, the good man, the compassionate soul who sorrowed for humanity, the noble searching mind that sought the truth—did he not sit under a tree to receive enlightenment ?

The belief that a god dwelt in a tree or that the tree was the spirit, naturally made the cutting down of trees a very anxious and nervous affair. If we remember that the holy basil of India (*Tulsi*) was believed by the Hindus to be pervaded by the divinity of Vishnu and his wife Lakshmi, it becomes easy to understand the idea that those who uprooted it would be punished by the offended deity.

(xix) *Cheremis* (once existed in Russia) groves that contained trees so divine that if touched by some unknown hand could only be appeased by other members of the tribe taking a goose, torturing it to death and then throwing it on the bin, while they prayed to the gods to punish the sinner and cause him to perish like the bird.[11]

We turn to India. The tree had originally grown across the principal pathway through the village, but at last hung so low that in order to enable people to pass under it, it had been turned aside and fastened paralled to the road. "In the operation the bundle of firbes which composed the root had become twisted like the strands of a rope. When

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11. Interested readers are requested to read 'Studies in Cheremis : The Supernatural' by Thomas A. Sebeok and Frances J. Ingemann, New York, 1956.

the morning sun struck on the upper surface of these, they contracted in drying, and hence a tendency to untwist, which raised the head of the tree. With the evening dews they relaxed, and the head of the tree then declined, thus proving to the man of science, as to the credulous Hindu, that it was due to the direct action of the Sun God" (Forest Folklore, A. Porteous).

There is something touching in the custom of the Indian priest who, obliged to cut down a tree for a sacrificial post,* was instructed by the *Satapath Brahman* to place a blade of *Durba* grass between the axe and the tree saying, 'Oh grass, shield it', and then before striking, to cry 'Oh axe, hurt not.'

Still the fact that we stumble is no reason to doubt the ability of earlier minds to move freely in these fields. Human nature may not change very much, but the mind does—a fact of intense importance to us all, calling for the consideration and understand for each fresh generation of thinkers.

Indian Aryans frequently made invocations to plants as also to rivers, the heaven and the earth as deities. The whole of one hymn (X. 97) of the *Rig Veda* is devoted to the singing of the praise of properties of plants (*Oshadhi*). The entire ancient Indian literature right from *the Vedas, the Puranas, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata* and *the Gita, the Manusamihta* to the works of Kalidasa and Tagore are teemed with the praises for trees.[12] The special characteristic of the Indian poets is their profound love and regard for Nature. They have observed the inanimate world not apparently with the eye of a materialist but with an eye of wisdom. एको देवः सर्वभुतेषु गूढ़ः । सर्व्वव्यपी सर्व्वभूतात्नरात्मा ॥ —So we see in Tagore "—অগ্নিতে জলেতে, এই বিশ্ব চরাচরে ; বনস্পতি ওষধিতে এক দেবতার অখণ্ড অক্ষয় ঐক্য।" (নৈবেদ্য) He is everywhere. He is ever fresh and of long standing. He is soul-conscious and an idol of boundless joy. His spiritual entity and delightful existence is glittering everywhere in this inanimate nature. Bathed with this consecrated trend of thoughts the sages of the *Upanisada* described : The God who exists in this universe, in water, in fire also exists in large trees and in herbs.

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* Some details on it are discussed by Samir Ghosal in his "Tree in folk life."—Ed.

12. Interested readers may read "Bharatiya Sahitye Traulata" by Dhyaneshnarayan Chakravarty (Tree & Plant in Indian literature) appeared in *Prabasi*, *Sravan*, 1364 B. S. p. 473-480.

So he said :—

मधुमन मूलं मधूमद अग्रमासाम ।
मघून्मध्यं वीरूधां वभूव ॥
मधुमत्पर्णं मधुमत् पुष्पमासाम् ।
मधोः संभक्ता अमृतस्य भक्षः ॥

Then

पुष्पवती प्रसूमतीः फलिनीरफला उत ।
संमातर इव द्रुहाम् अस्मा अरिष्ट तातये ॥

It has been clearly stated in the ancient Indian treaties that the trees have conciousness or feeling. In our time Sir J. C. Bose gave a scientific demonstration of it.

Before the Aryan invasion in the second millennium B. C. the old inhabitants of India did not probably differ with religious beliefs and customs from those of the primitive races. It was more or less confined to the crude animism and belief in the village deities. The philosophical system arose in the sixth century B. C. The primitive form of religion has greatly been modified by the Brahminical influence. So we find the same group of people worship at a time village deities alongside with *Shastriya* gods and goddesses. Ethnology knows no single people that has not changed in the course of time, that has not had a 'history'. At first sight the man of the archaic societies seems only to repeat the same archetypal act forever. But actually he is tirelessly conquering the World, organising it, transforming the landscape of nature into a cultural milieu."[13]

"The practice of giving the tree a human semblance by clothing it in garments or covering its stump in human form was the natural result of this worship amongst an artistic race, groping its way towards a concrete expression of its ideas. It represents the crude strivings of a people who, in their attempts to create gods in their own image, eventually produced an unsurpassable ideal of human grace and beauty . . . . . Bottiches produces several ancient designs in which the trunk of a tree is dressed as *Dionysus.*"[14] This crude worship of the god in the anthropomorphised tree lingered on amongst the peasantry side by side with splendid temple riturals, even into days when the revelation of a deity who filled all time and space, and was worshipped in temples not made with hands, was rapidly undermining the pagan worship of the cities. "It is the custom of pious travellers, when their way passes a grave or holy place, that they offer up a prayer for fulfilment of their

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13. Myth and Reality, by Mircea Eliade, London, 1964, p. 140.
14. The Sacred Tree, p. 31.

wishes, offer gifts and remain there a time. So, when I set foot in that most sacred city, although in haste, must crave for a pardon, offer a prayer and moderate my haste. For never was a traveller more justified in making a religious pause when he per chance shall have come upon a flower-wreathed altar, a grotto covered with boughs, on oak decorated with many horns, or a beech-tree with skeins hung to it, a little sacred hill fenced around, or *a tree trunk hewn as an image.*" (Apeleius, *Florid*).

This custom of carving a tree into the semblance of a god, and subsequently worshipping it as his sanctuary or symbol, was current in many parts of the world. Here is an important point to be noted. We know that the tree came into existence much earlier than the animal world. The new-born baby first saw the beauty of the tree as the primitive mother brought forth her first child under the shade of a tree. To protect this baby from harmful animals the mother used the branches of the trees as its cradle. It got tree as a comrade. Neither of the comrades could speak, still they maintained their friendship. From the beginning the tree became an indispensable part of the primitive man's life.

Needless to say that the ancient Indian people, as also the ancient people of the world, believed the world to be peopled by spirits—good or bad—who are the cause of all diseases and disasters. The object of the religion of the village folk was to propitiate these spirits. At the same time, each village seems to have been under the protection of some one spirit, who was the guardian deity of the village. In a great many place these spirits are represented by a tree, for example, the *Porama* of Nabadwip (West Bengal).[15]

Before the Aryan invasion, the population of ancient India seems to have been split up into small agricultural and pastoral communities. There was no nation and no conquering empire. When the Aryans overran India and the Brahmins had established their ascendency as priestly caste, the folk cults, such as the present one, were influenced by the Aryans.

In the ancient conception India was the land of the Hindus, so it was well-known as Hindusthan, the land belonging to the Hindus. At the stage when Hinduism was on the decline two developed religions hostile to it—Buddhism and Jainism—exercised a profound influence on the thought and culture of India and modified religious practices in certain respects.

There is no controversy that the "lowest levels upon which religion

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15. Folk cults and magical rites relating to rain in Bengal, by Samir Ghosal, appeared in the book "Rain in Indian life and lore" Calcutta, 1963, p. 85.

has taken definite form are Totemism and Fetishism. To the inquiring Nordic a totem pole is only a crudely carved and colored tree trunk. For the Indian who carved it, it was and is, as far as vigorous and inquiring Nordic has left the Indian either his land or his faith, his coat of arms, his family tree, his confession of faith, and the symbol of group relationships within which he cannot marry. The totem pole is only a symbol. The real totem is some species of bird or beast, reptile or fish or else some variety of plant 'between which and himself the savage believes a certain intimate relation exists'. Totemism is thus a primitive system both of religion and society."[16]

Totemism is a useful way of keeping family records and went some way in creating a comradeship more inclusive than the clan and tribe. Primitive man lives in an intimacy with nature and naturally he began nature worship with no temple, no priest or a few priests and a god for an altar. So the polytheistic nature-worship was gradually transformed into a mass of warring sects holding varying ideas and beliefs. Naturally in nature-worship men began what they saw first and knew best—Heaven, Earth, Rain, Thunder, Water and Sea, Fire, Sun, Moon, Tree, Serpent and so on.

Their worship spans millenniums and actually girdles the globe. These awesome forces become gods in their rising and began their long procession.

This is built on a solid foundation of nature-worship and represents some of its distinctive developments modified by race and circumstances.

"The five general steps by which religion has reached its most august heights are : Animism, the sense of a general animating power ; Spiritism, which vaguely individualizes citizens of the 'third order' ; Polytheism, which divides the sovereignty of the world between gods and goddesses who are partially, and in some religions entirely, personifications of the more enduring and prevailing nature forces ; and Monotheism, which assigns the enduring empire of the universe to one God. Pantheism does not lie in the direct line of this succession. India offers the only example of a vigorous Polytheism which was dissolved into Pantheism, and that was due to highly speculative quality of Indian mind."[17] There is no denying the fact that due to various influences, changes and modifications of different cultural and religious contacts, the *Shastrakars* of Hinduism became more rigid. So caste system arose and hardened into a most rigorous system of class distinction inspired and justified by the doctrines of transmigra-

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16. Procession of Gods by G. G. Atkins & C. S. Braden, New York, 1930. p. 8-9.
17. Ibid, p. 18-19.

tion of soul and 'Karma'. Hinduism is a medley of the diverse forms of religion, ranging from most subtle and abstruse philosophy to the primitive form of animism. But the primitive religions have been in their turn greatly modified by the Brahminical influence. The movement of modern nationalism in India, as in most other countries, has always shown a strong interest in the recovery and reinterpretation of traditional culture. These cultural traditions became the symbols of national identity which needed a meditative calmness of realization as a corrective to its excessive dependence upon change. By virtue of this role the Indian people witnessed considerable change in the life and religion of their own, quite different from their life as regional and local traditions which undoubtedly has played a great part in the development of the higher thought of Indian people. But in the villages, at any rate, the folk of about 80% of the population is represented by the worship of *Tree* and other popular nature-gods or *gramya devatas* in simple folk ways without creating enmity with Brahminical gods. The two types of religion exist side by side in town and villages and the same people have largely taken part in both. Naturally, therefore, they have borrowed freely from one another. In Indian villages, the influence of Brahminism on the cult of trees and other village deities or *gramya devatas* is noticeable and it is more probable that many popular ceremonies which originally belonged to the village deities, have been adopted by the Brahmin priests considering their popularity.* To undertake a research on this topic and to find out an exact position as to what extent the Brahmins adopted folk idea of religion in their system would be an ideal project.

Symbols by which trees are represented are almost as diverse as their names. There is no act of uniformity and no ecclesiastical calendar regulating the festivals or forms of worship of trees. In some villages, when there is a *Jagrata Devata* or a guardian deity in the form of even a tree, offerings of rice, fruits, sweets, flowers, pouring water with incense and camphor, are made every day by the village folk irrespective of caste and creed. Even the Mohammedans are allowed to pray or to offer gifts to this village deity as there is no religious bar or bias in the worship. It is not a communal temple, it is a secular place where all human beings are equally welcomed. So says the object of the worship. It is either to propriate the god or goddess and to avert epidemics and other calamities or to beg the blessings for any good work and fortune for the entire village

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* Such as. *A-Lakshmi* as Goddess of wealth ; *Vana-Durga* as Devi Durga and others. See "Tree in folk life" by Mamir Ghosal.

people and not for a single unit. This secular and cooperative form of worship played a great role in maintaining the unity of the village folk. Although, they seem never to be regarded as having any relation to the world as a whole and their worship is the religion of the ignorant and unlettered people, whose thought do not travel beyond their own surroundings and personal needs. On the other hand, the Siva, Vishnu and others represent a philosophic conception of great forces at work in the universe and all their steps are based on world perspective, and in all their deeds there have a universal appeal. The system, as it now exists, combines many different ideas and customs which evidently belongs to pastoral and agricultural community. At the same time it is quite possible that the ultimate origin of many of the rites and ceremonies may be traced further back to a nomadic stage of society. In the nomadic stage the society consists of tribes, or clans, the members of which are akin to one another. There can be no doubt, however, that in the earliest forms of worship current in India, the alliance between the plant world and the divine essence was extremely intimate. The great creative god Brahma, who, by light of his countenance, dispelled the primal gloom, and by his divine influence evoked the earth from the primeval ocean, is represented in Hindu theology as having emanated from a golden lotus, which had been quickened into life when the spirit of 'Om' moved the face of water. Again, in Brahminical worship the very essence of the deity is supposed to enter into the tree. The *Tulsi* or holi Basil of India is believed by the Hindus to be pervaded by the divinity of Vishnu and His wife Lakshmi, and hence is venerated as a god. It opens the gates of Heaven to the pious worshipper, and those who uproot it will be punished by Vishnu in time of eternity. There are much more trees of their kind which have been described challengingly by the learned contributors.

However little the votaries of trees and images derive from their observance apart from the subject strength and solace that flow from every act of worship, there was at least one tangible service their gods could render them—the right of sanctuary and asylum. For the sacred tree sharing as it did in the protective power of the indwelling deity, offered an inviolable refuge to the persecuted and the god's forgiveness to the sinner who implored it.

A deep study of popular folk religion like the present one will reveal a relation of tree and humanity. It may re-examine the contradictory meanings and applications of the rites and to clear the way for a genuine world history not in terms of nation or race or culture but in the forms of human being. The false separation of man and nature is acknowledged and we are faced with a new vision of man to encourage

a renaissance of hope in society as "the significant elements of the World Age now taking shape out of the core of that undimmed continuity of the creative process which restores man to mankind while deepening and enhancing his communion with the universe."[18]

The present study is a new survey of a form of folk religion, so offers a new chapter to the history of Indian folklore studies.

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18. World Perspectives: What This Series Means by Ruth Nanda Anshen, Myth and Reality, p. xiv, London, 1963.

SELECTED BOOKS THAT MAY BE CONSULTED

Besides the articles appearing here the interested reader is referred to the essays and travelogues published in different Indological and socio-biological journals. 'Folklore', 'Journal of Anthropological Society of Bombay'. 'Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal', different State Gazetters are recommanded to acquire exhaustive idea about tree symbol worship in India in the world perspective. Needess to say, new data on further field work may open up new vistas on the subject. The reader of a comparative study may also read the following books.

Baring-Gould, S.	..	Curious myths of the middle ages
Brand, J.	..	Observations on the popular antiquities of Great Britain
Carpenter, E.	..	Christian and Pagan creeds
Collis, S. John	..	The triumph of tree
Cunningham, A.	..	The Stupa of Bharhut
C. Scribner's son (pub)		Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, 12v.
Dalton, E. T.	..	Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal
Das, C. R.	..	Hinduism, Madras, 1924
Folkard, R.	..	Plantlore, Legends and Lyrics
Friess, H. L. & Schneider, H. W.	..	Religion in various cultures
Frazer, J. G.	..	The Golden Bough, 12v.
Farnell, L. R.	..	The Cults of the Greek States
Farquhar, J. N.	..	An outline of Religious Literature of India
Furgguson	..	Tree and Serpent Worship
Galton, F.	..	Narrative of an explorer
Grey, G.	..	Polynesian Mythology
Golbet d'Alvidle	..	The Migration of Symbols
Geden, A. S.	..	Studies in the Religions of the East
Hesoid	..	Works and Days
Herodotus, A. D.	..	Curry's Trans. Book VI
Homer	..	The Odyssey
Henderson, W.	..	Folklore of the Northern countries
Halliwell, J. O.	..	Popular Rhymes and Nursery Tales
Hopkins, E. W.	..	The origin and evolution of religion
Keary, G. F.	..	The Vikings of Western Christiandom
Lang, A.	..	Myth, Ritual and Religion
LeRoy, A.	..	The Religion of the Primitives

Maspero, G.	..	The Dawn of Civilisation
McNicol, N.	..	Living Religions of India
Marshal, Sir J. H.		Mohenjo-daro and the Indus civilisation
Maria Leach	..	Folklore Dictionary : Mythology and Legend, 2 v.
Marshall Jones (Pub.)		Mythology of All Races, 13 v.
Noble, Margaret	..	The Web of Indian life
O'Neill, J.	..	The Night of the Gods
Philpot, J. H.	..	The Sacred Tree
Porteous, A.	..	Forest Folklore
Pliny	..	Natural History
Poole, L. H.	..	Customs, Legends and Superstitions
Rendell, Harris	..	The Ascent of Olympus
Radin, P.	..	Primitive Religion
Shailer Matthewa & Gerald B. Smith (ed).	..	Dictionary of Religion and Ethics Etc.
Spengler, O	..	The Decline of the West
Seneca	..	Epistles
Smith, R.	..	Religion of the Semites
Schweitzer, A.	..	Indian thought and its development
Tacitus	..	The History
Tylor, E. B.	..	Early History of Mankind
		Primitive Culture
Virgil	..	The Aeneid
Wilde, Lady	..	Ancient Legend of Ireland
Whitehead, H.	..	The village gods of Southern India

And the holy scriptures of the Hindus like, *Manusamita, the Rig Veda*, the epics like *the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the Atharva Veda, the Padma Purana, the Banhi Purana* and others works.

SANKAR SEN GUPTA

FROM THE EDITOR

EVERY life has realization and it is inlaid daily. All organism want blessendness and try to stay remote from sufferings. It is natural for man to ask for comfort while he should always try to avoid distress. So if one gets hindrance from pleasure he feels anguish. When the work of nature goes on smoothly man feels pleasure, but when it is contrary he is overwhelmed with grief.

The happiness is adored while tribulation is a harm. The religion comes from propitiations and evils. The things which are innate is religion, its opposite side is irreligiousness. It is the habit of life to proceed to delight. So to lead easy and peaceful life is most welcome to man.

The common function of man is to eat, to sleep and to have conjugal relation. The difference between man and other lower animals is : man need to perform certain duties which the creatures other than man need not perform. When man could realise the action of pain he tried his best to get rid of it and from this effort the worship of the god of sufferings started. Because man thought there must have some supernatural power which destroyed the peace of man and created trouble in the easy work of the nature, so man discovered a way to appease the god of the evils by initiating its worship. He began to worship ghosts, goblins, spirits, supernatural beings, nature, stone and other things. After a further progress of time man did not feel happy only by refutating the pain or sorrow, he also liked to have pleasure, more pleasure and thereby began to worship gods and goddesses of pleasure asking their favour for joy and happiness. He believed, during this time, there was an unseen power which created trouble in the normal work of nature. If this power be properly propitiated he would be pleased on man and would not create hindrance. He also realised that there could not be any happiness if there was no lament. Of course, there are difference of opinions as to the existence of sorrows and joys. Some says, there is no happiness in the world. When man gets rid of the trouble, he faces, he gets pleasure and this pleasure is happiness. Others say, when pleasure do not get its free play or get obstruction, misery comes up. So they—the good and evil—are relatively connected and live together. Man tries to fight distress with all his might. He solicits

power from the gods and goddesses to fight out the evils and worship the gods of sufferings. From this rite and practice of folk religion the worship of *Shitala, Manasa, A-Lakshmi, Dharma* and hundreds of other folk gods and goddesses came into existence. This practice widened the idea of the worship of trees as symbols of different gods and goddesses which will be revealed in this volume. It is an important aspect of folk religion. A book on this topic has not yet been written in India. Folk-religion means the unity of divergent religions of the folk people of different geographical regions of India. So to understand Indian religion it is necessary to know its details from the lower stratum.

In this connection the serious general reader should note that as in archaeology "in digging from top to bottom one passes through the cultural layers in reverse sequence. While a test pit or trench may be useful as a preliminary survey, or may have to suffice when more extensive excavations cannot be attempted, more effective procedure calls for laying bare a considerable portion of the mound .... Hence it is important to clear an adequate area of each stratum and to record it in its proper order',[1] so is the case of folklore study where wide range of cultural and religious aspects are needed to be discussed. Some aspects of this very important culture-trait are illustrated in these pages by a group of learned Indian scholars of different branches of knowledge. They have considered tree-worship from different angles as a part of folk religion.

It is to be said in a special manner that the folk-religion of India have some major bond of unity in spite of its diversity and it is the special characteristic of Indian culture. India or Bharat has no typecal culture of its own. Indian culture or *Bharatiya Sanskriti* is a mixture of different small cultural units—where different religious thoughts and ideas of the people of different geographical regions are mixed together. The unsophisticated tradition of India is measured against sophisticated culture. This study represents a convergence of thoughts of the people who are directly or indirectly working on socio-folk-anthropological disciplines.

Most of the contributors to this anthology are aware of their responsibilities and have dealt with the subject with the desired sympathy and thoroughness. For reference, sacred trees and tree-worship in other countries of the world are mentioned in its pages. In India the rites of tree-worship differ from caste to caste, from state to state and from community to community. Yet the study reveals a continuity of living tradition. The tradition has undergone changes, and the changes may best be understood in psychological terms. Beginning with the symbolic age, passing through the typal, the conventional age and the age of reason, we seem to have arrived at the subjective age.

The material for this aspect of folk-religion has been gathered by a band of scholars from their own observations, earlier works and enquiries. This collection is perhaps the first attempt at dealing systematically with tree-symbol worship in India, though it does not pretend to be exhaustive. Still it will necessarily fulfil a long-felt need.

We now know that in serious study of folklore it is necessary to build up a theory after critically examining the materials. We have made an attempt here to provide materials on a variety of rites. As time changes, customs change, which is indeed the nature of continuity in folklore ; details change and so do the accepted reasons for the practice, but fundamentally the basic principle remains and falls into a definite and discernible pattern. In the following pages we shall notice how this happens.

Now "we have passed into a phase of superspecialization in every discipline, knowing more and more about less and less."[2] In the subject under discussion, unless we study and interpret tree in relation to the origin, development, culture-contacts of symbol worship, it will remain vague and unsatisfactory. Edward Tylor has "made animism the 'minimum definition of religion' and evolved from this basic belief in spiritual beings the development of the notion of God in human imagination."[3] Frazer contended that "an instinctive craving of the mind after simplification and unification' caused the innumerable animistic spirits and the departmental polytheistic gods to be reduced to one Supreme Creator and Controller of the universe."[4]

By the way, it may be pointed out again that the early contributors to folklore were attracted chiefly by the magical sides of rituals, but now it is recognised that even study of a particular aspect of folklore may open up new vistas for further research and much emphasis has necessarily to be laid on recording and preservation. The approach to the subject has been made with all possible care. Remarking on the village deities of South India, The Right Reverend Henry Whitehead, D.D., has correctly said, "To the Christian the study has a still greater interest, because amidst all their repulsive features, these rites contain instinctive ideas and yearnings which find their satisfaction in the highest truths of Christianity."[5] So it is with the Hindus, Buddhists and others. It is expected that the Christians will take the desired interest in this aspect of worship of the lowest stratum for a better understanding of this nucleal conception of god that culminated into a philosophical conception of godhead.

The tree-worship existed all over the world but how much, if at all, the influence of the Eastern tradition in the West led in many cases

to a mingling of the Indian, Asiatic or the Latin styles or the people of the Eastern land were influenced by the Western—are yet to be answered. The folks of India seem to have accepted the rites and rituals of tree-symbol worship from time immemorial and due to their coming into contact with their sophisticated brothers the rites have taken turns sometimes far away from their original source. In almost every Indian village, also in some towns, trees are worshipped and propitiated. When calamity overtakes the village, when pestilence or famine or cattle diseases make its appearance, it is to the village deity that the whole body of the village-folk turn to for protection.

The historian has done the study of traditional lore from the 'how' stage to 'why'. We need to amass specific data to know precisely how this tree-worship flourished, how much it changed. It is interesting to show how they are getting changed as a result of aristocratic influence as much as of communal growth. We should bear in mind in this connection that "not so very long ago, evidence gained from the study of archaeology was regarded with extreme mistrust and dislike by historians and philologists, accustomed to deal exclusively with the written word. No such evidence has become wholly respectable in academic circles, because the unbridled enthusiasm of the first amateurs has been tempered by a scientific discipline, and scholarly standards established ; at time it is even viewed with excessive veneration and its natural limitations forgotten. If folklore is to win similar recognition as a means of interpreting past, it will only be through a severely critical approach to the evidences which it provides."[6]

Let us also quote E. O. James who said, "It is not surprising that under the influence of the evolutionary movement out of which the anthropological approach to the study of Man arose (in which historical folklore must be included), much the same attitude was adopted at the human level in the interpretation of the origin and development of culture and its institutions, beliefs and customs."[7]

The present study is interesting, because it reveals many points of contact with primitive forms of religion of many lands and also because it enables the student of the subject to see religious ideas in different states of development.

We cannot but point out in this connection that the main conception of tree-deity became more definitely anthropomorphic on the one hand and less local on the other, the primitive representation of god in the tree underwent a change. Attempt has been made to express the human form of the god, such as, plantain-plant lady. The god widened his territory or absorbed other local gods, became associated with trees of a certain class, and was assumed to dwell on a particular kind of tree,

which thenceforward became sacred to and symbolical to him. This later idea received special development in India as it did in ancient Greece and Rome.

It is well known that the tree-worship is one of the stages through which the human race passed. It is the lowest form of worship by man. So Swami Vivekananda said, "Tree-worship and Serpent-worship always go together. There is the tree of knowledge. There must always be the tree, and the tree is somehow connected with the serpent. These are the oldest [forms of worship]. Even there you find that some particular tree or some particular stone is worshipped, not all the [trees or] stones in the world..... These are all low states of worship and yet worship. We all have to pass through them. It is only from an intellectual standpoint that they are not good enough. In our hearts we cannot get rid of them .....

"There is still a higher order of formal worship—the world of symbolism. ..... There are all sorts [of symbols] all over the world. ....there is some truth in symbolism. There cannot be any falsehood without some truth behind it .... There is the symbolic form of worship in different religions."[8]

It may not be out of place to have a look back here just to form an idea on the evolutionary theory. Let us refer to monkeys. Sooner or later amongst the New Appearances in the forests, which are the first creation of God, there rose the monkeys. They made the trees their habitation. We know that the monkeys started with four legs, gradually they changed their two front legs into something else—hands. "The most important thing which ever happened in the forest was the creation of HAND. This brings us to man. It has not yet been determined whether we really stemmed from the apes, or whether we had a stem of our own from which the apes degenerated. Whatever may be the solution, man did arrive. And we must note the responsibility of trees in this matter. The existence of tree was a prerequisite of conceptional thought. It was the tree that gave the hand to life. It was the tree that promoted the upright posture. It was the tree that made sight dominant over small." (The triumph of tree). Thus it was the tree that "laid the foundation both for fuller definition of objects by conceptual thought and for the fuller control of them by tools and machines." (The Universe of Man).

It can therefore be claimed that the tree gave man life. "When we pass in review the great gods that have come down to us, still carrying with them something of their magic in the very sound of their names, we found the most of them strated as trees, if we may put in that way. They developed into great and grandeur persons in the mind of their

devotees, but in the first instance they grew from trees or were trees. Though eventually they held court upon the mountains in all the panoply of deified beings, they could not have got them without benefit of the Oak, the Ivy, the Apple and the Mistletoe." (*Viscum Album* —The triumph of tree).

Thus with Zeus, who is the supreme deity in Greek mythology. He was the son of Kronos and Rhea and husband of Hera. How came he into the world ? "..... there is a terrible noise in the sky ; the thunder speaks ; it is a god, it is indeed a god of Gods, the most powerful of all, He who can shake the earth to its foundations. What is his external aspect, his visible incarnation ? See younder trees—an OAK. Look at its branches shaped in similitude with the lightning that is seen on the sky when the thunder speaks. Yes, the twisted branches flame that is traced on the dark scene of night is mirrored here in the contorted branches of Oak" (Moreover, according to Frazer, Rendell Harris and W. Fowler, the Oak is more often thunder-struck than other trees—thrice as often as the Pine, ten times as often as Beech). Next with *Dionysus,* the son of Zeus and Semele, a fertility god, behind him stands Ivy, *hedera helix,* an evergreen, climbing or creeping shurb. "The Oak was thunder. Animistic belief turned everything that thunder touches into thunder—tree, bird or bee. And that which grows on the Oak is thunder." Therefore, "the Ivy is thunder. And when the time comes for the animistic god-makers to project a lesser thunder-deity from the parasite on the Oak, then Dionysus will be that god". In the words of Rendell Harris—"When is phytomorph becomes the anthropomorph, the name of the new (subordinate) thunder-deity is Dionysus. In other words, *Dionysus is the Ivy,* in the first instance, he is Ivy, nothing more or less" (The Ascent of Olympus).

We know Apollo, the god of music, poetry, prophecy and medicine, the type of manly youth and beauty, and later identified with *Helios* "behind him stands the Oak, the apple and the mistletoe. The genesis of the god can be traced to the mistletoe on the apple tree—he was a projection from the Ivy, and Zeus from the Oak". It is also a fact that "laurel was as sacred to Apollo as the Oak to Zeus and that his worshippers attended no rites without a crown of laurel on their heads and a branch on their hands and the poet received inspiration and the prophet intiutive powers through the laurel staff which they carried" (The triumph of tree).

And then Artemis, who is the goddess of the chase and of the moon ; twin sister of Apollo, identified with Roman *Diana,* behind her stands mugwort, *Artemisia vulgaina,* an aromatic bitter herb, sometimes used in folk medicine as a diaphoretic and emmenagog. She too before

ascending the exalted hill, must rise from a plant. 'Just as Apollo can be traced to Mistletoe, his cult as healer and master of wizardy proceeding from the medicinal value of the mistletoe and certain other plants in his medical gardens, so, *Artemis* in her garden, with her medicine for women at childbirth and her herbs that are helpful and herbs that are fatal, goes back to the *mugwort* and starts on her journey as personified medicine." We cannot suppose that these remedies were always effective. But there is reason to believe that the mugwort was often a wonderful panacea as mother of herbal practice. It is also not difficult to suppose that the people were glad to attend at birth of a goddess. "That is her origin, her main root. Afterwards, the father fancy of image-makers was free to play around her cult, and many other plants became associated with her name. Just as Zeus become more than the Oak-God of Dodona and took upon himself the duties of a god of agriculture and accepted vegetable offerings, so *Artemis* also widened her scope and became associated with the cedar tree in Arcadia, with the myrtle in Laconia, with the willow in Sparta, while in the Achia she was worshipped as guardian of the woodlands and the nurturer of the hyacinth."

Let us turn to *Aphrodite,* the daughter of Zeus and Dione, the gooddess of love and beauty, said to have been born from the sea. Behind her stands the Mandrake, *Mandragora officinarum,* its fleshy roots, sometime having a fancied resemblance to human form "a gotesque parody of a man or a woman, the famous 'froked radish' of Falstaff. It was so alarming and dangerous a personality and it shrieked so loudly when pulled (See Romeo and Juliet, Act. IV, Sc. III shrieks like Mandrake torn out of the earth) that men dared not pluck it up themselves and employed a dog to do so, who then expired in agony. Bit by bit the idolators got to work in the graving of their image until at last Aphrodite in Greece and Venus in Italy rose from their root to receive the worship and enjoy the adoration of the people".

"Today the tree is the body, tomorrow the abode of a spirit—Animism turn into Poletheism. Thus we see the wild Huntsman of North America, known as Heno, riding the clouds and splitting the forest trees with this thunderbolts ; and then we see him, later, gathering the clouds together and pouring down warm rains—as a god of agriculture. Many simple spirit developed into a general spirit of vegetation ; and often enough in the primitive mind several different conceptions existed at the same time."[9]

Neverthless, we can say definitely that tree-worship, as distinct from fear of demons and belief in spirits, was spread through the world and also in India.

In these pages a reader will be pleased to read some details on the extent of power the tree exerts on human life and will also find some points for a comparative study. This distinctive trait of folk mind of India has been demonstrated at length in this compilation. In its dealing stress has been laid on 'oneness' of tree-symbol worship pattern in India. Some topics outside the scope of the title might have crept into it just to clarify the points raised by the contributors concerned. The discerning reader may also notice something like a lack of unison in the manner of approach to the subject. The reason that although it is a result of more than one and a half years' labour it is not a work of a projected scheme. There might also have been some repetitions here and there because of several writers writing on the same subject and as the pattern of tree-symbol worship and the worshipped trees are same in India. Needless to say, the contributors are regarded as authorities, they have made the task of writing for the general readers. Some have chanted the general trends and discipline of the tree-worship, others have integrated the findings of their disciplines in their own framework when the editor acted as liaison force.

In this connection, the editor intends to place before the reader that in the first instance, when the planning of the book was in progress, it was decided to name it as "Tree Worship in India", which term, on a second thought, was considered not to be correct enough, observing that the Indian folk do not worship the physical substance of tree. They regard it as symbolic of different gods or goddesses and worship it as such, about which we have also quoted Swami Vivekananda in an earlier paragraph. While the worship of this lowest form was purely animistic and tribal in nature, the insinuation of Brahminical rites and culture brought about so many changes. On a careful consideration of all these, and as suggested by Dr. Kalyankumar Ganguly of the University of Calcutta, it appeared to the editor that the title of the book as "Tree Symbol Worship in India" would be more logical and apt instead of "Tree Worship in India" and for this simple reason the editor could not accept Dr. K. D. Upadhyaya's naming "Tree Cult in India" or Prof. D. P. Ghosh's suggestion "The Worship of Tree Symbol in India" for which he regrets very much and appreciates their co-operations.

Technical matters have been avoided as far as possible, considering its approach to the general readers and it should be so received and reviewed. The foot-notes, references and the bibliographies, we hope, will serve the students and researchers.

It is obvious that different trees are differently named in our varying regional languages, while the name of some trees common India over undergoes alterations under the influence of regional phonetics. A

list of the glossary with their botanical names and their Indian synonyms is appended in view of its utility. The other two essays in the appendix "Tree marriage in India" and "Fertility cult and Tree" will provide the idea of trees in relation to human life.

The editor feels that the contributors of this anthology would be amply rewarded if serious general readers take their cue from it for further study. Before conclusion, the editor frankly states that the paucity of funds put limitations on the statisfactory production. Inspite of this, we the people of the Indian Folklore Society, are seriously trying to go ahead banking upon the sweat of our brow, leaving aside the question whether we shall get our deserts or not. Our previous anthologies have proved to be incentive to the interested scholars and we are happy our publications, be they of first-rate, mediocre or trash, are swelling in number. This is the justification for undertaking this study of a form of folk-religion. "As a living heritage from the past, being transformed in the present, and projected creatively into the future, it is both the subject and object of the changes now going on."[10]

The book is dedicated to the memory of the beloved mother of the editor late Satirani Sen Gupta (1907-1962) under whose care, affection and guidance the editor got in the field of folklore study and become devoted to it.

CONTRIBUTORS

K. D. UPADHYAYA is the assistant professor of Hindi, Government Degree College, Gyanpur, (Varanasi), U. P. He received his Ph.D on the Bhojpuri folksongs. In his paper he has dealt with the ancient Indian culture which flourished in the midst of forests and on the bank of the rivers. He has divided his study in three parts (i) mythological trees (ii) sacred trees and (iii) trees and plants of non-sacred characters.

S. K. JAIN is the Economic Botanist of the Botanical Survey, Government of India. He has said "The knowledge of the people about the plants around them and their usage for food, medicine, narcotics, ornaments, fuel, religious ceremonies etc. can be best studied by the method of personal observation and investivation". So he makes an appeal "that whenever there is a reference to a plant in a folksong, folktale or folk-riddle, make it a point to assure yourself the identity of the plant meant therein."

KUNJABIHARI DAS is the professor of Oriya, Ravenshaw College, Cuttack, Orissa and has been awarded his Ph. D. on the folklore of Orissa from Visva-Bharati. He is also a poet. In his paper he has described how the people of his state regard and worship a variety of trees. He has pointed out an important topic : "The tree is described in Oriya folklore to have possessed the miraculous power of flying.

TRILOCHAN PANDE is the assistant professor of Hindi, Gorakhpur University and has received his Ph.D on folklore of Kumayun. He has suggested how numer-

ous trees got a footing in the popular religion of India. He said "It cannot be said that there was only one factor wholly responsible for originating and developing tree worship in ancient India."

PUSHKER CHANDERVAKER is the Principal. Unjha Arts, & Commerce College and a creative writer of Gujarat. He has described some popular belief and folksongs which have relations with the trees and plants. He remarked. "to understand Man, one has to understand his relation with plant world as well as that of tree."

PRADYOTKUMAR MAITY, lecturer of History, Kanthi College, Midnapur, has been awarded his Ph.D. from London University. He said "The association of the tree in general and the snake seems to have originated for two reasons—the intrinsic sanctity of the tree in Indian mind and the fact that the trees are considered to be one of the places of residence of snakes."

B. L. DESAI took his M.Sc. from the Bombay University and an able regional folklorist. He has a great many papers in different learned and research journals. In his paper he said, "In Gujarat, trees are worshipped for devotional, medical and supernatural purposes."

K. N. SAHAY is the lecturer of Anthropology, Ranchi University and received his Ph.D. from the said University. In his paper he described the view of an anthropoligist and said, "The tree-cult in tribal culture can be understood on the level of different concepts, rituals, and ceremonies associated with this cult."

PRIYARANJAN SEN is the Retd. professor of English, University of Calcutta. A well-known worker on Gandhian philosophy. In his paper he has dealt with Basali—a variation of Chandi—from an original folksong.

P. C. DAS GUPTA is the Director of Archaeology, Government of West Bengal who earned fame as a good field worker when he was in Asutosh Museum of the Calcutta University. Joining the Government as the first Director of Archaeology he has established his claim. In a poetic title he has described the mystic relation between a recumbent lady and a dense forest.

KUNJABHARI SINGH is the professor of Sociology and has received his Ph.D. from the University of Bombay. Here he said, "during the post-Hindu period some Umanglai (literally meaning "the deity of the woods") are founded to have been identified with Shiva and Durga and some time the phallic or anthromorphis symbol of Shiva has replaced amorphus existence of such an *umanglai.*"

I. M. L. BHATNAGAR is the Editor of the State Gazetteer, Govt. of Punjab. He has a good many original papers and books to his credit and is a well-known journalist. In his article he has dealt with a form of folk religion of his State which is both social and secular.

P. THANKAPPAN NAIR is a student of Law of the University of Calcutta. He has described the tree worship of his own community. The editor has been informed that the whatever .Sri Nair has said about Nairs in his article applies to the whole of Kerala. Of course, its primitive people, such as, Kadars, Uraly, Kurumba, Irular etc. do not entertain such beliefs, so also the Christains and Muslims. The rest of the people of the State entertain such beliefs. In

short what has been said about the Nairs is not only confined to that particular community.

SATYAPRAKASH ARYA is the Head of the Department of Sociology, P. C. Bagla (Post-graduate) college and has registered his name for Ph.D. on the folksongs of Western U. P. from the Agra University. In his paper he has treated the importance of folk beliefs and rituals from the point of view of sociology.

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H. MANAPPA NAYAK is the Reader and Head of the Department of Linguistics at the University of Mysore. He earned his Ph.D. in Linguistics and Anthropology from the Indiana University and is the recipent of Calcutta University Gold Medal. His list of publications includes books and monographs of literary and linguistics interest. In his paper he has dealt with the treeworship of Karnatak.

P. K. MAHAPATRA is the Secretary, Bengali Publication Committee and Lecturer of Librarianship, University of Calcutta. He has received his D.Phil on the mediaval Bengali literature and has edited some useful books. In his paper he has divided the system of tree worship prevailing in Bengal in three main groups and has described the aspect accordingly.

SIBNARAYAN KABIRAJ has been in the folklorological field since long. His continuing research interests in sociological thought, topics of social structure & change and religion. In his paper he has taken up the problem of fertility and tree which sets out to introduce the reader to its scientific approach.

AMARENDRA MUKHOPADHYAY is a journalist who loves to recall how he had been "mixed up" with literary and journalistic activities from his school days. An ardent folklore enthusiast, his wide interests include philology, politics, dramaturgy and music. He has a book to his credit and writes in various journals under an assumed name.

SANKAR SEN GUPTA is the General Secretary and Director of Research of the Indian Folklore Society. He edits "Folklore" and "Kalyani" and has some books to his credit which are either edited or written by him.

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The editor acknowledges his debt to the learned contributors who very kindly responded to his request. He also hopes to make it more rich and include extra

articles in its next print from the scholars who intended to contribute in this volume but being unable to adjust their times could not comply with.

The editor is appreciative of Professor N. K. Chatterjee, M. A., who read some manuscripts Sri Sarajranjan Biswas who ably typed some manuscripts for the press and to Sri Amarendra Mukhopadhyay who read the proofs from beginning to end.

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K. D. Upadhyaya

INDIAN BOTANICAL FOLKLORE

In the religious history of the Aryan race in India, the worship of trees has played an important part. Nothing could be more natural. For at the dawn of history India was covered with immense primaeval forests, in which the scattered clearings must have appeared like islets in a vast ocean of green. Our ancient culture flourished in the midst of dense forests and on the banks of rivers. The saints and seers of yore, retired to the sylvan retreats and constantly thought of the subtle problems of religion and philosophy. These secluded places were the centres of all our cultural activities—i.e. religious, moral and educational. Many *Rishis* (seers) used to impart the highest knowledge to the students in their hermitages which were situated in dense forests. So, it is but natural that ancient Aryans developed a genuine love for the woods.

It is necessary to examine the notions on which the worship of trees and plants is based. To the primitive Indians, the world in general, was animate and trees and plants were no exception to the rule. It is a well-known saying in Sanskrit that "there is nothing in the world where life does not exist." So, from very ancient times, the trees and plants were regarded as animate beings and to harm them was considered a great sacrilege. Lord Krishna has identified himself with the Bo-tree in the *Bhagawadgita.* * *Shitala* is understood to be the Presiding Deity of the *Neem* tree. In the course of time, various gods and goddesses came to be associated with trees and plants and subsequently they began to be worshipped.

Trees provided fruits and fuel to the early people which were of great service to them. The weary traveller rested for a while under the cool shadow of leafy trees. Wood was used for constructing mud houses and furnitures. So the primitive man received four-fold gain from the trees standing as guards around him. In the rustling of leaves and breaking of branches, he suspected the misdeeds of evil spirits. Hence, the sentiments of adoration and fear crossed his mind simultaneously. It may be possible that due to these factors he might have begun to worship the trees for fulfilment of his desires, and used to propitiate them to ward off the malignant spirits.

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* 10/26.

As trees and plants were regarded as animate beings, so it was strictly prohibited to harm them in any way. Though there was no legal punishment for the 'culprit', as was the case in many countries of Europe, yet the moral law was there to desist him from his nefarious deed. It will be described in the following pages how the cutting of a tree and breaking away its leaves were considered as a sacrilege.

The conception of trees and plants as animated beings naturally resulted in treating them as male and female, who can be married to each other in a real, and not merely in a figurative or poetical, sense of the word. This notion is not purely fanciful, for plants like animals have there sexes and reproduce their kind by the union of male and female elements.

But in our country, the marriage of trees is only symbolical. If a Hindu has planted a grove of mangoes, neither he nor his wife may taste of the fruit, until he has formally married one of the trees, as a bridegroom, to a tree of different sort, commonly a tamarind-tree which grows near it in the grove. If there is no tamarind to act as a bride, a jasmine will serve the purpose. The expenses of such a marriage are often considerable, for the more Brahmans are feasted at it, the greater the glory of the owner of the grove.[1] Kalidas has mentioned the marriage of a *'Navamallika'* flower with a mango tree.[2] What I want to emphasise here is the fact that trees and plants have always been treated as living human beings.

In the following pages an humble attempt has been made to present before the readers the common beliefs and superstitions regarding trees, plants, flowers, fruits and vegetables which are prevalent among the people in rural and even in urban regions of India. This study is very interesting but the consideration of space has prevented the writer in going into greater details. It would be interesting to note here that these superstitions are not only confined to India but they are found also in other parts of the globe.

The present study has been divided in three parts :—(1) Mythological trees, (2) Sacred trees and (3) Trees and plants of non-sacred character.

(A) *Mythological Trees & Plants*

Kalpataru or the tree of eternity is a mythological tree which grows in the royal-garden (*Nandan van*) of Lord Indra. It is a symbol of plenty, prosperity, joy and happiness. It is believed that it fulfils

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1. Frazer—The Golden Bough, Vol. I, p. 151.
2. Shakuntala, Act IV. (Abridged edition).

the desires of all persons whatever may be their demand. The heavenly gods do not feel the pinch of penury and want due to this divine tree. Its fruits have the power to bestow immortality on the person who use them.

In Sanskrit literature the miraculous powers of this tree are described in greater details. It can offer to its devotees health, wealth, male progeny and prosperity. It was a product of the churning of the ocean by gods and demons and ultimately it was taken by the former to heaven and planted in Indra's garden. Kalidas has mentioned the fact that *'Kalpabriksh'* used to supply all the cosmetics desired by the wife of the Yaksha who was cursed to live in exile by Kubera.

The *Soma* plant (*Sarcostemma acidum*) which used to grow on *'Mujavat'* mountain yielded a milky, acidulous, narcotic juice. In Vedic India, an intoxicating concoction was prepared from its juice mixing it with milk, butter, barley and water. This drink was used in Vedic sacrificial rites, in honour of Lord Indra. The plant and its juice were considered to have divine powers and were worshipped as the incarnation of *Soma,* the revered Vedic god of the *Soma* juice, deity of the moon, and lord of the stars and vegetation.

'Soma' occupies the third important place in the galaxy of Vedic gods. The Ninth book of the Rigveda—which is known as 'Pavaman Mandal'—contain a number of *Suktas* (hymns) which are devoted to its praise. The Vedic warriors used to drink this juice before going to the battle-field in order to get strength and exhilaration. The botanical experts have tried to identify this plant but all in vain. So, more or less it may be regarded as a mythological plant.[2]

(B) The Sacred Trees and Plants

Pipal or the Bo (*Ficus religiosa*) is the most sacred tree in India. It is regarded as the dwelling place of the Hindu Trinity—Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh. It has been described as the tree of creation with its roots going higher up in the sky and its branches reaching the earth downwards. It is an immortal tree with its leaves always moving. It may be rightly compared with English Aspen whose leaves move due to shame because it was used in making the Cross.[3]

It is strictly prohibited to use Bo-tree as fuel. As gods live on it, it is a sacrilege to harm it in any way. No Hindu can dare to touch

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1. Meghduta, Part II.
2. B. D. Upadhyaya—Vedic literature and culture (Hindi), Page 433-34.
3. Crook. W., Popular religion and folklore of Northern India, Vol. II, P. 98.

it with the least intention of cutting it down. If he does so, he may displease the gods who will spell disaster on him.

In Northern India, women worship this tree on the fifteenth day of black-half of any month which falls on Monday i.e. *'Somavati Amavasya'*. They pour water and milk on its roots and offer sandal-paste, vermillion, wet rice (*Akshat*) and flowers. They make circumbulation for one hundred and eight times with their folded hands, putting a sweetmeat or a fruit as a count for each round. They tie thread round the trunk of this tree for 108 times which is symbolic of its sacred thread i.e. *Yajnopavit*. An old woman recites the story of Raja Nikunjali and his devoted wife Satyavati who was successful in winning the love and the confidence of her husband by paying her homage to this sacred tree. So, the worship of Bo-tree is symbolic of conjugal love and happiness.

In Rajasthan, the local women pay respects to this tree with their offerings in order to ward off widowhood.[1] On every auspicious occasion,—like sacred-thread ceremony and marriage—it is worshipped with due regard. Women pray to God to be favoured with a male offspring sitting under its cool shadow. It is believed that *Lakshmi*—the goddess of wealth—dwell on it on Sunday. So, this day is specially auspicious, for its worship. The man whose father has recently gone to the other world, pours down on its roots the water of 360 pitchers on this day, in order to propitiate the spirit of the dead. After offering his watery tribute, he makes five rounds of the tree.

In Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh it is a common custom to hang an earthen pot or a pitcher—which is known as *Ghant*—tied to the branch of this tree. The man who performs the last funeral-rites of the dead person—i.e. *Dahi*—pours in water, milk and *Til* in this pot twice a day and goes round it five times. It is popularly believed that the water, poured in this pot, reaches the dead man in the next world and quenches his thirst. In rural areas it is believed that the village-god (*Gram Devata*) dwells under its shadow, so some unchiselled stones are placed there which are worshipped by the common people.

In Buddhist world, also, this tree is regarded as very sacred. It was under the Bo-tree that Buddha—"The Light of Asia"—while sitting in meditation—gained the spiritual inner light and obtained the perfect knowledge and enlightenment of *Nirvama* (salvation). To-day a Bo-tree grows in every Indian village near a Hindu or Buddhist temple surrounded by a mud platform on which the meetings and medi-

1. Campbell—Notes, Page 238.

tations of the villagers are held. Bo-trees are exceptionally long-lived. The oldest of these trees stands at Anuradhapur in Ceylon and is believed to have been planted in 288 B.C.

It would be interesting to note here that prohibition to fell the sacred trees is limited not only to India, but in other parts of the world also it is commonly practised. The Wanika of Eastern Africa fancy that every tree and specially every coconut tree has its spirit. The destruction of a coconut tree is regarded as equivalent to matricide because that tree gives them life and nourishment, as a mother does her child. The Siamese monks believing that there are souls everywhere will not break the branch of a tree. Old peasants in some parts of Austria still believe that forest trees are animate and will not allow an incision to be made in the bark.[1] The number of such instances can be multiplied. The worship of this tree is prevalent in all the Buddhist countries and also in Africa, New Zealand, Australia and other parts of the Eastern Archipelago.[2]

The Banyan (*Ficus bengalensis*) is a huge tree famous for its leafy branches and cool shadow. Some of its branches take roots in the soil and grow out as separate trees. The Banyan is the tree of immortality. Even in the time of Deluge, when the whole world is flooded with water, it stands out prominently as the eternal tree giving protection to Lord Krishna in his child-form. There are so many references to it in Sanskrit literature. It is mentioned in *Aitareya Brahmana* that a certain king was asked to drink its milk leaving aside the juice of *Soma* plant. In the Ramayan of Valmiki—the celebrated sage of Tamasa and in the *Uttar Ram Charit* of Bhavabhuti, this tree has been mentioned as the undying one (*Akshay Vat*) which was situated on the confluence of Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati at Prayag (Allahabad), U.P. The descendent of this original immortal tree still stands in the fort at Allahabad. It was believed in ancient and medieval periods that suicide committed at this place, by throwing oneself from the top of this tree into deep waters of the Ganges, will lead to salvation. Hence pilgrims coming on their pilgrimage from different parts of India to this place used to commit suicide here. It is an historical fact that after the death of a certain Rashtrakuta king his queens numbering no less than one hundred and fifty committed sui-

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1. J. G. Frazer—The Golden Bough, Vol. I, Page 147-149 (Abridged edition, Mac. & Co., London, 1957).
2. Bake—Serpent worship, P. 18.

cide here.[1] The Chinese traveller Huan Tsang has mentioned the existence of this tree at Prayag in his travels.[2]

It is said that Satyavan was cutting the branches of this tree, when his wife Savitri received a stab and she succumbed to her injury. In the States of Maharashtra and Gujarat women worship this tree to honour the memory of Savitri on the 15th day of the dark-half of month of *Jyesth* (May-June). In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar also women offer their *'Puja'* (worship) to this tree and recite the story of *Bat-Savitri.*

Many folk beliefs centre round the *Neem* (*Azadirachta indica*) tree. *Shitala* (Cool One) the goddess of small pox—is said to inhabit it. She rests there seating in a swing and when she experiences the need for water, the gardener, who is her traditional devotee, supplies the same to the goddess. When a person suffers from small-pox, the leaves of this tree are used in several ways to lessen and relieve his ailment. He is fanned by the leafy twigs of this tree. Being the seat of *Shitala*—the Presiding Deity of this disease—its leaves are believed to possess a curative effect. There are many folk-songs in Hindi in which a stirring appeal is made to the goddess to free the patient from the torment. In the bright-half of the month of Chaitra (March-April) which is known as *'Nav-Ratra'* special importance is attached to it. The women worship it offering flowers, vermillion and other fragrant objects.

The oil extracted from the fruit of *Neem* tree, possesses much medicinal value. The temperature of the patient goes down if the oil is applied to his head and the lower part of the feet. Its flowers have the properties of blood-purification when used as syrup. The soap made out of it cures skin diseases and its tooth-paste is used for cleansing the teeth.

It is generally believed that a person living on the food cooked by using its wood as fuel, will have no effect of snake-bite. If a man is said to be bitten by a snake, he is asked to chew the leaves of *Neem* in order to find out the fact. If he feels its taste as bitter he is regarded as free from the bite. This belief is found in many other countries. In Northern Europe the leaves and wood of the Ash tree are regarded as the protector against snake-bite.[3] The people of Cornwall believe that no serpent can dare come near the Ash. If a person keeps with him a branch of it, he is perfectly free from the fear of snakes.

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1. Dr. Altekar—Women in Hindu civilisation.
2. Cunningham—Archaeological Survey Report, Vol. I, Page 5.
3. Folklore, Vol. III: Page 88.

The leaves of *Neem* are used to drive away the evil spirits. If a man is possessed of any spirit he is made to experience the bitter smell of the smoke coming out of burnt leaves. In order to ward off the malicious spirits, small pieces of *Neem* are burnt in the fire-pot placed near the door of the confinement room. It is believed that the smoke and fire of this wood are powerful enough to resist the entry of devils and demons into the room.

In Northern India, its leaves are used to protect the persons from the spirit of the dead while returning from the cremation ground. They remove the evil effects which are caused by the contact with the dead.

The following belief is common among the people of Maharashtra and Gujarat. When a woman is blessed with a child, an earthen pot, filled with the urine of the cow and *Neem* leaves, is placed before the door of the confinement room which wards off the entry of malignant spirits. It is still a custom among the *Chitpavan* Brahmans of Maharashtra that, if a person enters the confinement room, he has to wash or sprinkle on his feet, the urine of the cow with a twig of this tree.

The Brahmans of Poona, hang on the front and back doors of their house the leaves of *Neem* if they are favoured with a child. In Ahmednagar if a man is bitten by a snake, he is immediately taken to the temple of Bhairav, and is administered the leaves mixed with *Mirch* (black pepper). The priest tries to remove the effect of the bite by uttering *Mantras* (charms) touching the body of the patient with a tuft of leaves. The *Kanphata Yogis* (pierced ears) of Kachcha (Saurashtra) get their ears pierced and they use small pieces of *Neem* in their ear-holes. They[1] apply its oil to cure the wounds.

Several primitive tribes of Madras worship the *Neem* tree and make the symbol of this tree on the body of their dogs.[2] The *Banajaras* test the chastity of their wives by means of this. The husband throws a stick of *Neem* on the ground and says "If you are a chaste wife, please lift up the staff in your hand."[3] The Doms of Uttar Pradesh believe that Kali—the Divine mother—dwells on this tree. Kurmis also have the same faith. They place the image of this goodess under this tree and worship her with intense devotion.[4]

Bel or Bengal quince (*Aegle marmelos*) is called in Sanskrit '*Shriphal*', meaning the fruit of Plenty. It is a common belief that its leaves offered to Lord Shiva possess the cooling effect and lessen the

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1. Campbell—Notes, Page 234.
2. Mulale—Notes on Madras Criminal tribes, Page 20.
3. Crook, W.—Popular religion, Page 105.
4. Punjab Notes and Queries, Vol. III, P. 38.

heat of his body, caused by the drinking of poison. Many devoted persons write the name of Rama by means of sandal paste on its leaves and worship the Lord with them. It bestows eternal virtue (*Punya*) on the devotee. In Hindu mythology Shiva is described as intimately connected with this tree. Hence he is also called *'Vilvadanda'*—one endowed with the staff of *Bel* tree.

Due to its sacred nature, it (*Bel*) is used in making the funeral pyre for the dead bodies of rich persons. The sacrificial post—*Yupa*—to which beasts are tied and offered to the gods is made out of it. It is never used as a fuel for household cooking. The leaves of *Bel* possess medicinal properties and are specially effective in curing night blindness (*Ratandhi*).

The womenfolk of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh worship and embrace this tree in order to get their desires fulfilled. The devotees of Shiva tie to their pig-tails (*Shikha*) the *Bel* leaves as they are sacred and pleasing to their Lord.

The bamboo (*Dendrocalamus strictus*) tree occupies the same high status of sanctity as is enjoyed by the *Pipal* and *Bel* trees. Due to its sacred nature, Lord Krishna used to play on the flute made out of green bamboo. He charmed the *Gopis* (devotees) of Vrindavan with its sweet notes and tender melodies. Bamboos grow in clusters, so it is regarded as a symbol of large progeny. It is known in Sanskrit as *'Vansh'* which literally means a clan or family.

In Northern India, the green bamboo and its branches are used in making the bridal *Mandap* (pavilion) under which the marriage ceremonies are performed. The *Arathi* (coffin) of a dead person is made out with green bamboos. Kabir—the celebrated saint poet of Hindi —has referred to this fact in one of his melodious songs. The Brahman student is given a bamboo stick on the occasion of his sacred thread ceremony. At the time of *Shraddha*—last rites of a dead person —bamboo cots are offered to the priest. Though rich persons give costly *'Palangs'* (bedstead) but the bamboo cot has its special significance. It may be mentioned here that only green bambooo is regarded as sacred. The dry one is deprived of all its sacred nature.

It possesses the additional quality of warding off the evil spirits. The Turi tribe of Gujarat place two small pieces of Bamboo in the room of confinement, so that no malicious spirit can have its influence on the new-born baby. In Bihar and U. P. the newly-married couple place their feet in a bamboo basket and walk 'dead' slowly, so that they may not fall flat on the ground. It is very auspicious to walk in this manner because it is symbolic of a large family. The Pravoos of Poona, put on

the heads of the bride and the bridegroom, the baskets made of bamboos. The Mubasis of Bengal ask the married couple to go round a bamboo post. The Garos and Kacharis of Assam worship the bamboo post after planting it in the ground. It is a wide belief in U. P. that 'Churail'—a female evil spirit—lives in the groves of bamboos. Its small and thin branches (*Koyin*) are used in removing the bodily pain.

Anavala (*Phyllanthus emblica*) is called *'Amalak'* in Sanskrit. It is worshipped by women specially in the month of *Kartik* (September-October) with flowers, sandal paste and vermillion etc. with a view to be favoured with male progeny. On the ninth day of the bright-half of the month of *Kartik*—which is known as *'Akshaya Navami'* (the imperishable Ninth)—a special offering is made to this tree. On this auspicious occasion Brahmanas are fed while sitting under the shadow of this tree. This brings boundless merits (*Punya*) to the host. The members of other castes who have none to feed them, cook their food sitting under its shadow and take their meal there where no big trees are available, the sapling serves the purpose.

It is considered meritorious to offer a kind of white pumpkin (*Petha*) to the Brahmanas as a gift. A small portion of the pumpkin is cut out and some small pieces of gold, silver and brass coins are put in the hole. It is covered with a new cloth and presented to the priest who accepts this as *'Gupta-Dan'* (a secret gift) blessing the donor to have a male issue. The womenfolk make five circumbulations of this tree, and tie a thread round its trunk each time. This symbolises its sacred character.

Mango (*Mangifera indica*) is the most popular tree of India. It has a number of varieties which are named after its shape, colour and taste. The *'Langra'* of Varanasi and *'Dashahari'* of Lucknow (U. P.) are the most important among them. The flower of the mango is called *'Manjari'* which is highly spoken of in Sanskrit literature as an object, producing sentiments of sexual feeling in the hearts of lovers. Its fruit is used as a *'Prasad'* (gift) to be given to the devotees, which brings to them prosperity and wealth.

The small branches and pieces of the mango tree are used in sacrificial rites. The oblation may be offered only in that fire which is made out of this wood. The funeral pyre of a person is made of mango wood which is regarded as holy and sacred. In the sacred thread ceremony it is used in various capacities as a wooden seat (*Pidha*) to sit upon and a slate on which the *Brahmachari* writes down the alphabets.

On all auspicious occasions such as birth and marriage etc. the leaves and wood of the mango tree are used almost at every step. The

'Torana' (a long rope in which leaves are tied) which is hung around the house is made of these leaves, and even in the marriage *'Mandap'* its leaves are used for decoration. Clarified butter (ghee) is poured into the sacrificial fire by its leafy spoon. The bridegroom while performing the marriage rites sits on a seat of mango wood.

Some people use its small twigs as tooth-brush. But it is strictly prohibited to use it for this purpose on Sundays and Tuesdays. It is a suitable substitute for 'Chichindi'[1] on the fifth day of the bright half of the month of Bhadra (July-August). It is sinful to remove the leaves from the tree in the night. The green mango tree is never cut down, otherwise it may spell disaster on the person concerned. Its fruit is symbolic of male progeny, hence it occupies a prominent place among the objects of *'Prasad'* (gift).

Palash or the bastered teak (*Butea frondost*) grows luxuriantly in the forests of India. Its wood is used in producing the sacrificial fire by rubbing two sticks together. Its leaves are symbolic of the Hindu Trinity—*Brahma, Vishnu* and *Mahesh*—the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the world respectively. Its leafy plates are used in taking food.

It is considered sacred to burn the dead body of a person with *Palash* wood. The sacrificial post is prepared out of it. The *Brahmachari* holds in his right hand the *Palash* stick while his sacred-thread ceremony is being performed. Kalidas, the Prince of Sanskrit poets, has expressly mentioned this fact, when Shiva disguised as a student approached Parvati to test the reality of her love for the Lord.[2] It was a common custom in ancient India, to touch the cows with a *Palash* staff, in order to separate them from their calves. It may be compared with English Rowan tree which is used by the cowherds of Scottland to ward off the evil spirits which try to enter the cowshed. It is believed in Germany that the cows which are beaten by its sticks yield more milk.[3]

On the beautiful sea-coasts, the tall and slender coconut (*Cocos nucifera*) trees present a fine feast for the eyes. The cause of its sacred character is due to the fact that its fruit resembles the head of a man. It is why in ancient times, the coconut was offered to the gods instead of a human head. Its fruit is a symbol of fecundity, so the women who nurse the desire for a son, are given a coconut as *'Prasad'* (gift) by the

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1. A kind of plant which is used as tooth-brush specially on the Rishi-Panchami *Vrat* (the fast of *Rishis*).
2. Kumar Sambhava canto—5.
3. Crook—Popular Religion Vol. II P. 113.

priest. In olden days, it was a custom to present it to the king as a gift by the Brahmanas. In all sacrificial rites, it is offered as an oblation to the sacred fire.

The coconut is held in high esteem in Gujarat and Karnatak (Mysore). It is customery in Gujarat to present its fruit to the bridegroom by the bride at the time of her marriage. It is preserved as a precious memento by the husband throughout his life. The people of Mysore worship it as family-god. The Kunabis of Konkan in the State of Maharashtra worship the coconut which they preserve in the memory of their ancestors. At the time of harvesting, they use to distribute this fruit among the labourers. The members of the Prabhu caste, cause to move a coconut round the head of the bridegroom for several times and throw out its pieces in all directions. They believe that this rite prevents the evil spirits to have their influence on the bridegroom.[1] In Northern India, during the marriage and Tilak ceremonies the offering of the coconut is considered as very auspicious. The head of a dead Sanyasi was used to be broken open with this fruit, so that, his Vital Airs (*Prana*) may pass out through the *'Brahma Randhra'* i.e., the hole in the head. In Western India, it is understood that the sea in high tides may be appeased by offering the coconut. It is a common sight at Chaupati in Bombay to see a number of devotees, on the full-moon day, making their offerings to the Lord of Waters.[2]

The Sandal is a rare tree which grows only on the Malay mountains in the State of Mysore. In Hindu mythology it has been described as surrounded by snakes which are attracted by its fragrance. It is believed that the wind passing through it has the property to transfrom other trees into Sandalwood. The Sanskrit, poets have a given a fine description of the cool breeze coming from the Malay—*Malayani*—as soothing the tender hearts of lovers.

It is regarded as a sacred tree like the mango and Bo. The devotees of Vishnu apply sandal-paste on their forehead which is a distinct feature of their sect. The sandal cut into small pieces, or powdered and mixed with ghee, is thrown into the fire as an offering to the gods. Along with barley and *Til* it is also offered as an oblation.

It is the fortunate few whose funeral pyre is made out of sandalwood. The poor who cannot afford the luxury of it, put at least one or two sticks into the pyre of the dead. Besides Hindus, the Parsees of Bombay burn sandal dust in their houses. It is commonly believed that no evil spirit can dare come near the house where its fragrance

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1. Crook—Pouplar religion Vol. II P. 106.
2. Ibid P. 106.

pervades. It is used also for extracting oil and scents. The Sandal forest is the monopoly of the State Government of Mysore.

The birch tree (*Betula utilis*) is very effectuous in charms and spells. In ancient India, it was used as a material for writing. Many Sanskrit manuscripts are preserved which are written on the bark of this tree (*Bhurja-patra*). Mantras or spells are written on its bark with red ink by the priest or the pandit and given to the devotee as an amulet to cure disease. It also possesses the power of keeping away the demons and devils. No evil eye can harm the person who puts on the amulet. So the mothers tie round the neck and the right hand of their young children the *'Tabij'* (amulet) prepared by the priest or the fortune-teller.

The *Tulsi* (*Ocimum sanctum*) is the most sacred plant in India. No plant in the world commands such an universal respect, adoration and worship from the people as does *Tulsi*. It is the plant par excellence.

'Haripriya' which means dear to Lord Vishnu is a term in Sanskrit applied to *Tulsi*. It is also called *'Bhutaghni'*—the killer of demons. Hence there is a strong belief in the countryside that evil spirits can never dare come to the place where *Tulsi* is planted. This plant is worshipped all over the year but a special importance is attached to its Puja in the month of Kartik (November-December). Womenfolk plant a *Tulsi* sapling in their house and they worship it twice a day with wet-rice, flowers, vermillion and sweets. A lamp filled with ghee is lighted daily and a regular *'Arati'*[1] is performed in the morning and evening. They offer the water of the Ganges to it and chant a *Mantra* (spell) which means that the worship of *Tulsi* removes all the sins and the devotee is granted wealth and happiness in the world.

It is stricity prohibited to pluck off the leaves of *Tulsi* on Sundays and Tuesdays. It is a sacrilege to boil its leaves in hot water because it torments the soul of the plant.

The Vaishnava devotee offers his daily meals to Vishnu by putting a leaf of *Tulsi* in his food. It is believed by the people that the menu of the ceremonial dinners at auspicious occasions cannot come to a finish if *Tulsi* leaves are thrown into it. On the eleventh day of the bright half of the month of Kartik, the image of Vishnu is worshipped with its leaves. The *Tulsi* is married to Vishnu on this auspicious day, hence it is known as *Haripriya*.

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1. The offering of a lamp of ghee.

The leaves of *Tulsi* along with the water of the Ganges are put in the mouth of the dying man under the belief that they will lead to his salvation. Many *Sadhus* particularly those belonging to the *Bairagi* sect put on the garland of *Tulsi* round their neck. They count or chant the names of Ram on its beads. It is understood that if a man swears while taking in his hand its leaf and the Ganges water he dares not tell a lie. So, even in modern days, this practice is resorted to in Indian Courts in order to extract the true facts of a case from the culprit or the witness.

Tulsi is regarded as the mother and hence is called *'Tulsi Mata'*. Indian folk-songs are full of praise of this plant. Its leaves possess medicinal value and are used to cure fever, cough and other diseases. *

The Banana or plaintain (*Musa sapientum*) is found almost in every state of this vast country. It is a sacred plant which is particularly worshipped in the month of Kartik. Its long and broad leaves are used as a plate for food. In the State of Tamilnad Brahmanas always take their food on its leaves. On auspicious occasions the gates are made with the trunk of the banana. Its leaves are used in decorating the marriage *Mandap*. In the Nainital district of Uttar Pradesh the image of Nanda Devi—a local goddess—is carved out of the trunk of banana. The hill people worship the goddess on the occasion of *Nandashtami* fair. If a premature delivery is caused to a woman in Tamilnad, the new-born baby is made to sleep, each day, on a fresh leaf of banana.[1] Its fruit grows in clusters hence it is regarded as symbolic of fecundity. The newly-wedded bride is given this fruit as *Prasad* (gift) which assures her progeny. The childless women worship the rising sun on the sixth day of the bright half of Kartik which is known as *'Dala Chhath'* offering to him milk, banana and sweets to be blessed with a male issue.

The *Kush* grass (*Eragrostis cynosuroides*) has a wild growth on the marshy lands and on the banks of the rivers. It is no exaggeration to say that no sacrificial rites can be performed without this sacred

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* It may be interesting to note here a news item which appeared in the Northern India Patrika, Allahabad (U. P.), dated May 26, 1963 which informs that the research carried on in the Ballabhbhai Patel Chest Institute has led to the conclusion that 'Tulsi' is very useful in resisting the growth of tubercle bacilli. The news-item runs as follows :—

"Tulsi—the plant with divine qualities—is found to have active substence to resist the growth of tubercle bacilli. Occimum sanctum (Tulsi) was for ages considered in India to possess medicinal qualities and was used to cure many an ailment.

A study carried out by the Ballabhbhai Patel Chest Institute here (New Delhi) has shown that the oily substance obtained from 'Tulsi' was active against T. Bem bacteria."

1. Crook—Popular religion, Vol. II, P. 108.

grass. Hence the priests and pandits make it a point to collect the *Kush* on the fifteenth day of the month of Bhadrapad (July-August) which is known as *"Kushotpatani Amavasya"*. While pulling it out the priests utters the *Mantra "Om Phat Swaha"*.

The *Kush* grass is strewn over the small platform (*Vedi*) which is used for marriage rites. The bridegroom puts on his middle finger a ring made of it. If a man swears by truth he puts a small piece of it with water in his hand. When an offering is given to a dead person the *T'il* and *Kush* are used there. If a person dies in a far off land with no religious rites performed after his death, an effigy is made out of *Kush* grass which is known as *"Kush-Patrika"* and is burnt into the fire. A dying man is made to lie down on the mat of *Kush* before he breathes his last. It is potent enough to drive away the demons and evil spirits. The *Sadhus* tie round their waist a girdle of *Kush,* so that, no malicious spirit could torment them.

'Gudahul' or shoe flower (*Hibiscus rosasinensis*) is a big flower red in colour. It is the favourite one with goddess *Kali,* the Divine mother. So the *Shaktas,* the devotes of *Durga* offer this flower in their daily worship. It is also used in offering *Argh* (watery oblation) to the Lord of Light (Sun). People believe it as the dwelling place of *Kali Devi.* So the women ask their children not to touch its flowers specially during the summer season.

The shoe flower is the most suitable medium for charms and incantations. The witches perform their evil designs through it. It is a common sight in India to witness this flower, in the early morning, placed on the ground at the crossings of highways and by ways. People believe that the one who touches it, is 'possessed' by the evil spirits.

Kevada or Screw pine (*Pandanus Odoratissimus*) is regarded as the dwelling place of serpents. So, nobody plants it near his house. Its flower is noted for its sweet smell and is believed to attract snakes.

Lotus is the most beautiful flower famous for its tenderness and surpassing beauty. It is the seat of *Saraswati,* the Goddess of Learning. It serves as a cosy repose for Lord Vishnu who rests on it. Many celebrated Sanskrit poets have sung hymns of praise about this wonderful flower. It is regarded as the perfect symbol of beauty, prosperity and unity. It smiles to see the shining sun and closes its eyes (petels) in the darkness of the night. It is a favourite flower with Shiva. The lotus is regarded as the national flower of India.

'Suryamukhi' or the Sun-flower (*Helianthus annuus*) is big and round in shape. Generally it has yellow colour. It is said that it always faces the sun, so it changes its direction accordingly. When

Francisco Pizarro in 1532 fought his way into Peru, he found there the giant sun-flower venerated by the Indians as the sacred image of their sun-god. The Incan priestesses, the Maidens of Sun, wore on their breasts large sun-flower discs made of virgin gold. The sun-flower seeds were also sacred food to the plains Indian of North America. They placed ceremonial bowls filled with sun-flower seeds on the graves of their dead, for food to sustain them on their long and dangerous journey to the other world.[1]

(C) Trees & Plants of Non-Sacred Nature

Gular (*Ficus Glomerta*) is a very useful tree. Juicy substence comes out from its stem when cut down. Due to the medicinal value of its juice it is known as *'Hem-Dugha'* (of golden juice) in Sanskrit. It works wonder to cure hysteria and prevents abortion. According to Hindu Mythology the seat of god *Vivaswan,* who is worshipped at the end of the *Soma* sacrifice is made of this wood. The royal throne of god *Soma* is carved out from its trunk. Manu, the law-giver, has ordained that the staff used by the *Vaishya* student at his sacred thread ceremony should be made of it. It is believed that in the night of *Dipavali,* the festival of light, all the gods gather together on the top of this tree and they pluck out its flowers. So, its blossoms are seldom seen. It is a common belief in the eastern districts of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar that if the flower of *Gular* (wild fig) is put in the cooked food or store it can never become empty.

It is most inauspicious to plant a *Gular* sapling near a house. It is regarded as a tree of gloom and sorrow. So, Bhojapuri mothers curse their naughty children to sit and weep under it, and eat its unpalatable fruit which is known as *Goda.* Its mere shadow is enough to deprive a person of all his piety and virtues. Hence religious men and women pointedly try to avoid to come near it.

The *Shalmali* or silk cotton tree (*Salmalia malabaricum*) is of huge dimensions, almost touching the sky. One of the hells mentioned in the *Puranas* is named after it. People who have to visit this hell due to their sinful acts are bitten badly and thorns of this tree which are known as *'Kuta Shalmali'* are pierced into their bodies. The palanquins used by brides and bridegrooms in their marriages are made of this wood. The primitive tribes, mostly Kols, plant a post of silk cotton in the marriage *Pandal.* In Uttar Pradesh, *Bansphora,* a depressed

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1. Ernest & J. Lehner—Folklore and symbolism of flowers, plants and trees Page 48.

class, also use its in their marriages. It bears a big red flower which is devoid of all smell.

The silk-cotton trees which rear their enormous trunks to a stupendous height, are regarded with reverence throughout West Africa. Among the Ewe-speaking peoples of the Slave Coast the indwelling god of this giant of the forest, goes by the name of Huntin. Trees in which he specially dwells are surrounded by a girdle of plam leaves and fastened to the trunk or laid against the root of the tree.[1] In India it is believed that evil spirits dwell on this tree, hence people fear to go near it in the night.

The Mundas and Santals of Bihar worship the *Mahua* (*Bassia latifolia*) tree on the occasion of marriage. It is held in high esteem by several primitive tribes of Madhya Pradesh. The Bhuyias place the small branch of this tree on the hands of the bride and bridegroom. A curious custom prevails among the Gonds that they hang the dead bodies of their relatives to the branch of this tree before burying them.[2] But in Bihar and U.P. it is looked down upon because its leaves are not used on any ceremonial occasion. The Brahmanas consider it a sacrilege to take their food in the leafy plates made of it. Even a casual stroll under its shadow is regarded inauspicious as it may produce intoxicating influence.

The flowers of this tree are used in making the country liquor, and its fruits are useful in preparing the oil which the village folk use to light their cottages. In ancient India, beautiful garlands were made out of the *Mahua* flowers at the time of *'Swayambar'* (choosing of the bridegroom by the Royal princesses). Sanskrit poets have spoken very highly of the beauty and delicacy of these flowers.

The *Babul* (*Acacia arabica*) which is known also as *'Kikar'*, is found extensively in the plains of Northern India. It grows on its own accord and is never planted by anybody. It is an unsacred tree in the Indian botanical world. Hence its use is prohibited in all sacrificial rites. It is said that *"Churail"* dwells on its branches. If a man pours out water on the roots of this tree, continuously for thirteen days, he can overpower the evil spirit living on it. William Crook has mentioned a true story where a 'dead' man returned to life because he had controlled the dead spirits[3] which were living on it. He has described another incident that some Muslims tried to fell a *Babul* tree situated near a temple. But blood began to come out from

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1. Frazer—The Golden Bough, Vol. I, P. 148 (Abridged edition).
2. Dalton—Descriptive Ethnology of Bengal, Page 148.
3. Crook—Popular religion etc. Vol. II. Page 114-15.

the wound. Being scared by the devil, they fled away in hot haste.[1] If a man sleeps on a *Babul* cot he dreams bad dreams. Its fruits are potent enough to create troubles and quarrels among peaceful neighbours. Its leaves and skin possess medicinal properties which cure many ills. Its gum is used as a tonic. Its small and thin branches make a fine tooth-brush which are daily used by the village-folk.

The palm (*Barassus flabellifer*) belongs to that category of Indian trees which are regarded as unsacred. It is a tall tree with no branches at all except some big and broad leaves on the top. Its juice which is known as toddy, posesses intoxicating properties which is used as common beverage by the low castes of Northern India. The poor people who cannot enjoy the luxury of champagne or claret satisfy themselves with this juice. It works as a stimulus to labourers and workers and hence they drink it to their heart's content. The toddy shops are auctioned by the Excise department for a fairly large amount, so they are a source of revenue for the state exchequer.

Judged from all canons of utility the palm wood is useless. It can neither be used as fuel nor any construction can be made out of it. It is believed in rural areas that *Khatamals,* bed-bugs, multiply in thousands if a fruit of the palm is placed on the cot. So, the women of the household take great precaution not to allow it in the house. It is an ideal place for evil spirits to live in. If a man is suffering from a certain eye trouble (*Anjan hari*) he has to point out his little finger towards this tree in order to get himself cured.

The pumpkin (*Cucurbita maxima*) is a common vegetable used by the rural people. Its creeper is planted near the house and it is allowed to spread over the roof-tops. Its small fruit is termed as *"Batiya"*. It is popular belief in the countryside that if this fruit is pointed out by *'Tarjani'* (the first finger) it automatically dies out on its own accord. Tulsidas, the celebrated Hindi poet, has referred to this fact in his *Ram-Charit Manas.* In order to give a fresh lease of life to this dying creeper, the water, in which gold ornaments have been washed, is poured out into its roots. Earthen pots painted with black and white colours are placed in the fields to ward off the evil eye which may prevent the growth of its fruit.

The pumpkin is regarded as a symbol of son, hence no woman, having a male issue, can dare cut it into pieces. The boys of the household are asked to break it first, only then the house wife can touch it. No dish can be prepared of this vegetable on Sundays and Tuesdays. If it is done by mistake, the woman who is favoured with

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1. Ibid Page 114-15.

a son, should not mix salt into it. The growing of pumpkin in abundence is looked down as inauspicious.

There are several kinds of vegetables which are rich in folklore. *'Sataputia'* which is called in Sanskrit *'Sapta-Putrika'* (possessing seven sons) grows in clusters. The womenfolk of Bihar and U. P. observe a fast on the seventh day of the black half of the month of *Aswin* (September-October) known as *'Jiutia'*. It is essential to eat this vegetable on this particular date which assures numerous offsprings (at least seven sons).

Karami or *Karemu* is another vegetable which is particularly taken on the fifth day of the bright half of the month of Bhadrapad (August-September). The fast of *'Rishi Panchami'* is observed on this day and *'Tinni'* rice(a kind of rice grown in water without ploughing the land) is used for this purpose.

The skin of "Lauki" (Gourd) if trampled under the feet, leads to many skin diseases, hence it is immediately thrown out of the house. If fishes are placed under the *Alval* (the water basin which is dug our round the plant) of this plant, it yields in abundance. The oven dusts are scattered over its leaves in order to protect the plant from insects. It is strictly prohibited to use *'Nenua'* (another vegetable) during the black half of Aswin by the person whose father is not alive.*

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S. K. Jain

THE ROLE OF A BOTANIST IN FOLKLORE RESEARCH

In a broad sense, folklore includes the study of all aspects of intellectual and material culture of the primitive, backward or indigenous people.

The word primitive has been variously used and defined. In some recent literature, it has been used to refer to people who do not have any written language, and who orally transmit the knowledge of their arts, traditions and customs from one generation to the other. There are some exceptions, however, and certain aboriginals, such as the Maldive islanders, are reported to have a written language. Further, one interesting criticism to this definition was put forth in a recent Pacific Science Congress at Bangkok, that we, with a large number of written languages, may be branded as primitives by our grandchildren a thousand years hence.

The tribal people in India, as in other parts of the world, live in natural surroundings—in forests, in remote valleys or on mountains. They take birth, grow and die, almost literally, in the laps of Mother Nature, who provides them with what they need for food and shelter. The tribals have the vast wealth of plant and animal organisms around them, and merely by the method of trial and error they learn what is useful to them.

Since, the prime necessity for every living organism is, and has been, food, primitive man must have eaten experimentally every conceivable plant material for satisfying hunger. In course of time he experimented with plants, also, for treatment of his ailments and for covering the body. The knowledge of this natural wealth around him —the use to which a particular plant or animal could be put—became an essential part of equipment for him.

The great variety and abundant quantity of the plant wealth around him greatly influenced his existence. Plants influenced intellectual as well as material culture of man ; such as the ballads, tales, songs, legends, myths, rhymes, riddles, and proverbs. Apart from being the source of subsistence, plants influenced man's festivals, customs, witchcraft, etc. This association is even closer today, and the indigenous

people procure materials for their huts, agricultural implements, utensils, ornaments, musical instruments, etc. from plant products.

The old proverb 'necessity is the mother of invention' shows its best expression in tribal situations. Plants being sole natural resource in easy approach and abundant supply, tribals devised ingenius means of utilising them. For example, during recent studies in Bastar district of Madhya Pradesh, the different uses to which one climbing plant *Bauhinia vahli* Wt. & Arn: (locally called *Mohlain, Paur,* or *Siadi*) is put, were closely observed. Its use for cordage is well known, but the multiplicity of its uses among the Adiavsis was astonishing. They used its fibre for ladder-steps, sacred thread (Yagyasutra, Poita, Janeu), Chappals, tiger traps, in bone surgery, etc.

Plants are proud possession and property of the indigenous people, and this close association has given rise to a rich plant folklore or botanical folklore. References to plants are, therefore, found in writings dealing with different aspects of folklore.

The study of the inter-relationship between plants and people, chiefly the indigenous people, forms the subject of Ethnobotany. Works pertaining exclusively to ethnobotany of India are almost nonexistent ; and those for other countries are also too few. However, useful information on ethnobotany has been recorded rather indirectly, by various specialists, such as archaeologists, historians, explorers, travellers, administrators, geographers, missionaries, foresters, linguists, doctors, folklorists, nutrition specialists, and of course many botanists.

This information about plants got recorded in these writings rather indirectly ; it was rarely written with the purpose of recording or transmitting oral traditions about plants. It is for this reason, as well as for lack of botanical background in most of these authors, that references about plants in these writings are usually very vague. Mostly, only local names are mentioned ; their spellings are inconsistent and phonetic indications are not given. The result is that the plants which were used by the natives, or were precisely meant by the authors, cannot be correctly understood. I have discussed in a separate communication (Jain, 1963 c) the merits and demerits of local plant names and have pleaded that inspite of some shortcomings, natives should continue to use the local names, and any standardised or all-India names should not be imposed on them. Such imposition can amount to contamination of their language and lore.

Bringing together relevant information from published or unpublished and ancient or recent literature on botanical folklore of a particular tribe or of a region inhabited by them can be a very useful con-

tribution to economic botany as well as as to sociology. In a preliminary study of some ethnographies of central Indian tribes it was found (Jain & Tarafder, 1963) that many reports of plant remedies for snake-bite have remained almost unnoticed for the last thirty-five years. There is scope for much research work on these lines ; it will yield valuable data on material culture of the primitive people and will also provide opportunity of comparative studies.

Von Reis (1962) has recently shown that a study of herbarium specimens can also reveal valuable ethnobotanical information. Most of the readers would know what a *herbarium* is ; for the benifit of those who may not, it may be briefly described here. A herbarium is a sort of library or a collection of files where dried specimens of plants are kept neatly preserved and pasted. Botanical explorers collect plants in a specified manner, dry them, preserve them with insecticides and fungicides and paste them on standard-size card sheets, on which are also written detailed notes about locality, date, uses, local names, etc. After the botanical identity of the plants is established, i.e., the scientific name in assigned, they are put in respective systematic places. We have in India, herbaria in all State capitals, and some other towns ; the important ones are at Calcutta, Dehradun, Shillong, Poona, Bombay, Lucknow and Coimbatore. The herbarium at Calcutta (Sibpur) has over two and a half million sheets. The oldest collections in some world herbaria date 300 to 400 years old. A close study of the notes on these sheets recorded by their collectors gives useful information on botanical folk-lore of those regions.

Laboratory studies on biological remains in archeological sites have revealed plants used by the primitive people of historical times. Decorative motifs on old monuments indicate occurrence of certain plants in those times, extent of knowledge of plant morphology among those people and occasionally other associations, such as plants used in worship, in gifts, in gardens and plants used as incense, cosmetics, medicine, etc.

The knowledge of a people about plants around them and their usage for food, medicine, narcotics, ornaments, fuel, religious ceremonies, etc. can be best studied by the method of personal observation and interrogation. For establishing authenticity of this information, it is imperative to collect samples of plants. Many very good references and researches on chemistry or medicinal uses of plants cannot be utilised for want of precise botanical identity of the concerned plant material.

The author makes an earnest appeal to field workers in folklore,

that whenever there is a reference to a plant in a folk-song, folk-tale or folk-riddle, make it a point to assure yourself of the identity of the plant meant therein. In many cases, due to your experience in that region, you will straightaway know the plant by the name given in folk sayings. In order to leave a permanent and useful record of your notes for posterity, give along with the folklore name, also other vernacular names of that plant. In case of those plants where the name given by the informant is new or strange to you, the informant should be asked to show the plant. In all probability you will know this plant also, but by other name. Record the name given by the informant and the names by which you knew the plant. For example, while working among the Gonds one will often hear the names *Garang, Moda,* or *Idum.* These do not convey anything to an outsider. When led to the plant you find the very familiar tree of *Mahua.* In your field notes record along with *Garang, Moda* or *Idum* also *Mahua.* It will facilitate in establishing later on the botanical identity of the plant. If, however, the plant is entirely new to you, it is almost necessary in the interest of science, to make a specimen and refer to some botanist. Any account of folklores would become many times more useful if the names of plants are authenticated by scientific names and preferably specimens. Collecting plant specimens is as important as collecting samples of their dresses, utensils, agricultural tools, ceremonial head and other wears, and other museum specimens.

In this context, mention may be made of the ethnographies written by Elwin (1947), Grigson (1949) and Nag (1958) ; these authors have given botanical names of plants in footnotes or as appendices to their books.

Based on field observations during last about three years, accounts have been prepared of plants used by the tribals of Madhya Pradesh, particularly of Bastar district, for food, medicine, witchcraft, etc. (Jain 1963 a, b, d, e ; 1964 a, b). Plants put to other uses are being studied. These accounts contain botanical name, plant family, all available local vernacular names, the language or places related with these local names, detailed notes on tribal uses and the localities where information or the specimens were collected. These studies have now been extended to tribal societies of West Bengal and the district of Purulia is being presently studied (Jain and De, 1964).

The need to make a faithful study and record of folklore, may it be folk-tales, folk-songs or folk-medicine, cannot be over-emphasised, particularly in this age when the increased demands of food and other

supplies, and the process of accultration are fast changing the intellectual and material culture of the indigenous people.

Dr. R. E. Schultes (1960) so nicely put it : 'What does interest us academically and practically is how to salvage some of the medico-botanical lore before it should have been forever entombed with the culture that gave it birth'.

This becomes all the more important in a developing country like India, because the forests, the vegetation cover, the plant weaith from which this rich botanical folklore originated, are fast disappearing under the impact of industrialisation.

So, we have to work fast against the disappearance of the people who participated in those old cultures and even the very material, i.e., the forests on which that culture largely depended.

Intelligent discretion is, however, necessary in interpretation of these data. All that the tribals would say about the medicinal uses of plants would not be gospel truth. Yet recent researches in Mexico and other countries have shown that things which seemed to be fantastic claims of native informants turned out to be remarkable truths. We cannot afford to ignore any aboriginal use of plants merely because it seems curious or unbelievable. To do so would mean turning our backs to pursuits of knowledge, and to bury forever materials which may come out to be treasures, may ameliorate human health and may add to the prosperity of our race.

This ethnobotanical information would not be of mere academic interest ; it can have immense economic possibilities. It may be mentioned here that the basic principles of our modern plant-based industries such as pharmaceuticals, breweries, textiles, etc., had their origin in primitive discoveries and practices. They have, in course of time undergone great mechanisation, advancement and refinement.

The ecologists, soil scientists and the foresters want to know how the primitives have been influencing the plant wealth by cutting and burning. The anthropologist needs to know how the natural green environment of the tribals has effected their thoughts, economic activities and attitudes. A comparison between different tribes as regards their knowledge of plants gives useful clues in tracing migrations and affinities, so also do the resemblances and dissimilarities in native plant names among different people.

The phytogeographer needs information on centres of origin of cultivated and other plants and routes of migration or dispersal of plants ; material on these are available from botanical folklore. The economic botanist is keenly interested in knowing the possible new

sources of proteins, starches, alkaloids, saponins, tans and other useful products, which can contribute to our efforts for wiping out hunger and disease from the face of this early.

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Kunjabihari Das

THE PLANT IN ORISSAN FOLKLORE

The richest source of folklore is mythology. The intercourse between the myth and the folktale is always occurring. In course of retelling of tales, or recitation of oral songs which have used the mythological materials, the myth loses much of its divinity and becomes a legend. The God or Goddess of the Purana is more humanised. This has happened in case of Brundabati of mythological fame. In local legends she is called Brundabati, Tulasa or Tulasi who grants children to the childless, wealth to the needy and opens the gates of heaven to the pious.

Worship of the Tulasi :

Tulasi is found before every Hindu dwelling or Vishnu temple in India and is the most sacred of all plants. It is the symbol of Brundabati, the wife of the demon, Jalandhara. Her purity and chastity sustained the life of her husband who had no *dharma* of his own to stand on. Krushna had to outrage her modesty in the guise of her husband and then could kill him. Brundabati came to know this fact and cursed Krushna with the following words—

> **"I shall be born in the form of the sacred Tulasi plant and you will have to bear my leaves on your head for the wrong you have done to me."**

Krushna who was now full of remorse, granted her desire and thus paid the highest regard to the chastity of woman. The leaves of the basil plant were more acceptable to him than any other beautiful flower.

Brundabati is now found in front of many of the Oriya homes in form of a stone statue of typical Oriya woman with all her traditional ornaments and she holds on her head the pot carrying the basil plant. Pious old men and women water the plant after their bath every day, sip a little water from its root, decorate their forhead with a bit of its sacred clay. To eat or drink anything before the worship is considered a sin. Every evening a candle (prepared out of torn cloth and soaked with oil) is lit on the *chawra* (pavement) of the plant by the house-

wife who bows down and expresses her sorrows in whispering voice and seeks remedy.

Ganges, the sacred river is said to be at its root. Brahma, the creator, lives on its branches. Other gods and goddesses reside on its sacred leaves. *Tulasi* is the meeting point of the heaven and the earth. Virgins cleanse the pavement every morning, draw beautiful designs of gods and goddesses, saints and the feet of *Lakshmi,* with rice paint or powder and believe that this service will please Brundabati who will bless them with suitable husbands.

Widows of the village resort to her worship in *Kartik,* (October-November) the most sacred month of the year for them. They take their bath in early morning, put on a garland of beads, made out of wood of the basil plant, decorate the *Tulasi* with flowers and its root with designs of conch, wheel, club and lotus, utter *hulu* sounds, give offerings and sing the following song of prayer :—

O Brundabati, I bow down
And salute at your feet hundred times
Give me good intellect and knowledge
Give me shelter at your feet
in heaven after death
I salute you hundred times.

Rai-Damodar worship is celebrated by widows for twenty-five days in *Kartik* (October-November) on the pavement of the basil plant. *Rai* was the daughter of a devotee who gave her in marriage with lord *Jagannath.* This fact did not enrage *Lakshmi* who was a goddess. She rather gave her a boon which meant that *Rai* would enjoy the privilege of being worshipped with the lord for twenty-five days in a year. Thus *Rai-Damodar* worship was introduced and it found favour with widows only. This is not in vogue among brides who worship *Lakshmi-Narayana* on ceremonial occasions.

Two of the widows assembled at the *Chaura* represent *Rai* and *Jagannath* and play at dice. *Jagannath* pawns one of his ornaments every time and loses it at his defeat in the play of dice. He loses his gold ring, bangles, crown and all other ornaments. Lastly he pawns his own self and is again defeated. This continuous defeat humbles him and keeps him always devoted to his clever wife. Widows observe this vow to secure devoted husbands in their next birth.

The songs of prayer of the housewife differ in matter and spirit from those of the widow. She is full of worldly longings and prays to Brundabati to grant her rich clothes, valuable ornaments and good children. She is *Lakshmi* herself so far as the satisfaction of urge for

wealth is concerned. But she is more easily approachable and the process of her worship is simpler.

"I lit a lamp and prayed to Tulasi
I prayed for golden bangles
Rich clothes for daily use,
Reserve of old stock of paddy, never-ending
A son like Krushna on my armpit
My husband hale and sound
and he alive till my last breath."

Pana Sankranti, the festival of sweet cold drink is celebrated on the pavement of the *Tulasi.* It occurs on the first day of *Baishakh* (April-May). A small leaked pot filled with *'Pana'* (cold drink) is hung on the basil plant with the support of bamboo rods. The *'Pana'* falls drop by drop, symbolic of rainfall. Cultivation starts from this month. Rains is not far-off.

Ladies pray to *Brundabati* for safe return of their sons and husbands from far-off foreign countries.

The fast of *"Kharakhari"* is observed by virgins of the District of Ganjam on every Sunday of *Chaitra* (March-April) Kharakhari, the goddess of this fast is worshipped at the root of the *Tulasi* plant. Virgins pray to her to grant them good husbands, for they have attained maturity and have become fully fit for marriage.

Brundabati is the presiding deity of *Jahniossa* (name of a fast), observed by virgins only. Some tales depict the glory and whimsical nature of the goddess. She compels all virgins to observe the fast and punishes those who stand on the way of her worship. *Jambubati's* son was bitten by a snake, for she laughed at a devotee and was restored to life after her due prayer and worship. The five sons of *Sukanti* were concealed in the hollow of a tree for she was against the worship of this goddess. They were restored to her after due worship. The goddess threatened a lady in dream that if her daughter would not observe the fast, all her sons would be killed within a week.

A girl's hand rotted and fell piece by piece, because she plucked a *'Jahni'* (luffa acutangula), a forbidden fruit for virgins in the month. She recovered after worship. The traditional nobleness and pristine purity of her character is found to be absent. She does not pardon the slightest offence and takes revenge upon any delinquent till her submission.

Virgins on the full moon day of *Aswin* (Oct.-Nov.) worship the moon at the root of *Tulasi.* They sing the beauty and glory of the moon and display their skill in *puchi* which is an inter-mixture of dance and play.

So *Brundabati* or the basil plant is considered as the representative of all local deities. She may be compared to a sacrificial fire. Ghee is poured upon the fire and the god whose name is invoked at the time of offering, receives it in heaven. Similarly offering given at the root of *Tualsi* is received by the god or goddess whose name is invoked.

Brahmins beg pardon of the goddess for the offence of plucking the leaves of basil plant. They do it after due prayer. No one is permitted to touch its leaves at night. It is said that all sorts of diseases have their abode on its leaves after the dark. This is to frighten the people who may not obey the rule and carelessly tear away its leaves.

Worship of other trees and plants :

The new-moon of *Pausa* (December-January) is called *Baula amasya* (new moon of mango blossoms). Mango trees are expected to bear blossoms from that day. Manda cakes (cakes of round shape and white flour, prepared with rice powder, cocoanut, cheese and molasses) are offered to the mango tree in the evening. The trees are expected to bear fruits of their size and sweetness.

Bel is sacred like the *Tulsai*. Siva is fond of its leaf as Krushna is of *Tulasi*. People of higher caste do not dare burn its wood for fear of rousing indignation of the God of destruction. The *Nim* tree is equally sacred or more. The images of *Jagannath, Valabhadra* and *Subhadra* are erected out this wood. The lord in wooden form is called *Darubrahma* or *Darudevata*. From time immemorial nobody knows what kind of wood actually came floating across the sea to the shore at Puri out of which the first images were built. But now unspoiled *Nim* trees are needed every twelve years for erection of new images.

The cocoanut is called *sriphala* (fruit of great beauty or utility). It is needed on all auspicious occasions. A pitcher of water is placed on some white paddy. A branch of mango tree is placed on the pitcher. The cocoanut adorned with sandal paste, vermilion and flowers is placed on that branch. This is called *Purnakumbha* (full pitcher). Gods and goddesses are invoked and worshipped in that symbol. This *kumbha* is indicative of full success of one's mission. This is placed at the door when one goes out.

The image of *Saraswati*, the goddess of learning is drawn on the dry cocoanut shell. She is worshipped on the day of *Basanta panchami* by the school-boys and girls. They carry the painted cocoanut from door to door, sing a traditional song of prayer of *Saraswati* in every house, get some money and give it to their teacher out of devo-

tion. The cocoanut shell painting is no longer in practice. At present the clay image has taken its place.

On the 9th day of the bright fortnight of *Kartik* (October-November) widows of the village assemble and worship *Jagadhatri*—the universal mother who is said to be the presiding deity of the *Amalaki tree*. *Lakshmi* is the universal mother who protects the devotee and fulfils all her desires. This is called the *Dhatripuja*—worship of the mother. *Radha* is identified with *Lakshmi*. Thousands of people go to Sakshigopal to have a look at her feet on that particular day.

Worship of *Karma* or *Kadamba* tree is in vogue among the aborigines of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh. A branch of the above tree is cut and carried in ceremonial procession by the people on the eleventh day of the bright fortnight of *Bhadra* (August-September), is decorated with clothes, sandal paste, vermilion and flowers and is worshipped. The branch symbolises *Karma devata* (god of fortune) who cures all diseases, grants wealth and children to the devotee. The story of seven merchant brothers who incurred the displeasure of the god of fortune and underwent a lot of sufferings, repented for their folly and got back ali their wealth and property is told in presence of a big crowd.

A saying goes as follows—

Age bun pachhe bun
Garvanaku tun tun,
(Sow early or late
Ears appear in the womb or rich plant by Garvana)

Paddy plants represent *Lakshmi* and are worshipped when ears of corn appear in their womb. *Mana* (small measures), *gauni* (big measures), *pakhia* (rain cover extending from head to thigh, made out of palm leaves) are worshipped along with the ears of corn. People take full meal that day with the hope that they will get the same throughout the year.

Paddy plants are also worshipped on the last day of the reaping. Some ears of corn are left uncut in one corner of the field, set apart for the purpose every year. They are taken out after due worship and are treasured in the barn with utmost care. Offerings are distributed among the workers of the field. This is called *kheta-badha* (the last ceremony of reaping). The plants as is believed have a part to play in regard to longevity of human life.

The *Sathi ossa* (the ceremony of blessings) is held on the sixth day of the bright fortnight of *Bhadra* (August-September). Beautiful

designs of lotus and the feet of *Lakshmi* are drawn on the place of worship. Foreheads of children are decorated with vermilion and sandal paste and they are welcome with *hulu* sounds and wave of butterfed lamps. Then leaves of bamboo, weed plants, paddy plants, arum plant (saru), *Bajramali* (a wild plant) are collected and tied together. Elderly women after the worship of *sathi* who grants long life, strike seven times lightly with those plants on the heads of the youngsters and bless them with the following words—

May you have a long life
May you have sound health
May you have continued prosperity.

The children respond saying 'yes', 'yes'.

Marriage of two trees :

Sometimes banian tree and peepul tree are planted by the roadside or on any fallow land. They grow up as one tree. The two trunks are joined together though their leaves, fruits and colour of the branches differ. When they sufficiently grow up and are considered to have attained maturity they are married like human beings. Rich people spend lavishly in the performance of this marriage. Poor people also spend all their life's deposit on this occasion. They plant the tree in early life and the marriage is celebrated in their old age. The planter may die prematurely. Then somebody else may come forward to perform the ceremony. People take it to be a pious act. Nobody dares cut a single branch from either of these trees as it amounts to breach of conjugal life and love and is a great sin.

Marriage of man with a tree :

The widower who has lost two wives has to marry a *sahada*[1] tree. It is believed that such marriage can effectively evade the premature death of the third wife.

The Tree as the greatest saviour :

The pregnant wife of one hankered after certain fruits which were available on the bank of a tank in which a crocodile lived. As he plucked the fruits, the crocodile came forward to devour him up. The man promised to offer his child to be born to it and got his release. A female

1. SAHADA—Morus Indica—Mulberry.

child was born. As she attained maturity, she was left by the tank under some pretext. The crocodile kept her in a dirty hole. She fled away when it went out in search of food. The crocodile followed her. She asked a *Sahada* tree by the roadside for protection. The trunk of the tree opened up. As she entered into it, it closed up.

A prince who watched this incident made up his mind to marry this tree against the wishes of his parents and well-wishers. The demand was however met. The tree was cut at its root. Branches were chopped off. The trunk was placed on the altar and decorated. The marriage ceremony was over. The trunk was carried to the sleeping chamber of the prince. In the midnight the girl came out of the trunk, ate, drank. When she was out, the prince burnt the trunk. She was very sorry for the loss of her abode. The prince consoled her saying that he could not raise his head in shame for this marriage with a tree.

The tree saves the life of a prince or princess in danger and may have to sacrifice its own life in the bid. The prince followed by a giantess sought protection of a mango tree which immediately burst open and gave him shelter. This was noticed by the giantess. She by the art of changing shape and trickery became a queen and ordered to cut down the mango tree. She tasted every bit of wood, but found no trace of the prince. Long before that the prince escaped through the benevolence of the tree. There appeared a single blossom on a branch. It bore a single mango. It immediately ripened and fell down in the river or tank. The ripe mango was swallowed by a big fish and the prince was protected.

The tree as destroyer :

A giant may transform himself to a tree to dupe his prey and easily overcome him, but is ultimately destroyed.

A carpenter desiring to have a cot for himself cut down one of finest trees of the forest. The tree stood up as usual and said to the carpenter that it would not fall down unless his eldest son was sacrificed. The carpenter agreed and sent his eldest son with a bullock cart to carry the log home. The black bullock dissuaded the son to proceed further. For the tree was a giant and might devour him up. The brown bullock handed over to him a miraculous broom-stick and an egg as weapon against the powerful giant. The son fled away with the weapons. The tree lengthened itself unusually and could see the carpenter's son running away. It followed in big jumps and was about to capture him when the son threw the miraculous egg. The egg burst

and a stream of strong current flowed. The tree crossed it with great difficulty and followed him again. The carpenter boy threw the broom-stick. To the surprise of the giant there appeared a dense forest of bamboos. He angrily broke a number of them. As one bamboo rubbed against another, there appeared a wild fire which destroyed the bamboo forest and turned it into ashes.

Transformation of human body to a plant :

One of the Oriya folk-tales says that the minister's daughter possessed the power of changing herself to a *champak* tree bearing flowers of gold. A pit was dug out. She sat in it and was covered with soil. Turmeric water was sprinkled over her. Then there came out a *champak* tree which budded and bloomed flowers of gold. Her attendant plucked them all and said "Rise up O golden flower"—then the tree was changed to a human form.

This transformation was a sign of good fortune. She increased the wealth of the family and was considered to be *Lakshmi* personified.

But unfavourable circumstances sometimes compel the hero or heroine to change the form for self-protection. A person cannot die prematurely even if he or she be killed. She is born in form of a tree or plant and changes to her original shape when she is out of danger. *Kanchanabati* was killed by her brothers who duly cooked and ate her flesh. But from the remnants of her body, buried under the earth came out a *Kanchan* tree which bore beautiful flowers. This first attracted the notice of the barber of her father's village. When he attempted to pluck some *Kanchan* flowers the tree said :

"Thiri thiri kari tolare barika
gachharu patara jhadeti
Mo bhai mote khandare hanila
thaim ki mo deha thareti."

O barbar,
Please pluck the flowers gently
Or my tender leaves will fall down
My brothers killed me with a sword
I still tremble with fear.

The barber told this pitiable story to the king. The king was sad to know the tragic end of his dearest daughter and went to the tree which recited the same melancholy song. The *Kanchana* tree turned herself to *Kanchanabati*, his daughter of exquisite beauty and charm.

In another story, the real princess was violently thrown into a well. The giantess who took away all her ornaments and dress by her trickery, became the queen. The princess seemed to be dead. Her human form disappeared and there bloomed a lily in its place. The

giantess who watched this incident in the well was clever enough to pluck it and throw it away. The lily, torn, and pale, dried up and disappeared and there grew up a pumpkin creeper which bore many pumpkins. The giantess boiled and cooked one of them. In course of its boiling the pumpkin narrated tragic story of murder in a loud voice. The king heard it and instantaneously killed the giantess. The princess jumped out of the cooking pot in human form.

In another story co-wives plotted against the chief queen. It was propagated that she gave birth to puppies. She went into king's disfavour, was degraded and had to cleanse the cowshed. Her children were thrown out. *Ganga,* the goddess to save them from further oppression of step mothers, turned six male children into *Arjun tree* and the female child into a *Patali*[2] *tree.* They were planted on the embankment of the king's garden tank. *Patali* was full of flowers. The gardener tried to pluck them. The *Arjun* trees advised the *Patali* in the following way—

May your branches touch the heaven
May your branches touch the earth
The gardener of the king has come
Should we give flowers ?

No, sons and the daughter of the king,
we live and are now grown up
But our unlucky mother—once the queen,
Look, is cleansing the stable.

The branches of a *Patali* were lifted up. The gardener failed to pluck a single flower. He narrated this strange incident to the king who at once went to the bank of the garden tank. The same song was repeated. Branches were raised up. The king could not pluck any flower. Now the youngest queen who had to do all the rough work like a maid-servant came to the place. All the trees broke over her and to the surprise of the people who assembled there, there appeared six young sons and a daughter. King was very sorry for his youngest queen who now received great ovation. The queens who played mischief and were directly responsible for her suffering, were buried alive.

Symbol of life :

A tree or plant may symbolise life. If any harm is done to the hero or heroine the symbol is affected. This symbol is called the passive index of life. In an Oriya story entitled *Bole humti,* the merchant planted a plantain seedling and said, "If you are of the age of truth, you will abide by my words and will reflect on yourself the

2. *PATALI*—Sterospermum Suaveolens.

reaction of what happens at a great distance. If my wife is all right you will live and grow. If any danger overtakes her, you will wither and perish".

One day the plantain tree turned pale and its leaves dried up. The merchant at once returned home and found to his horror that his wife was taken away by the king.

The Flying tree :

The tree is described in an Oriya folktale to have possessed the miraculous power of flying. The prince used it as conveyance for quick arrival in the marriage ceremony of a princess.

The tree of cakes :

Children grow curious of the legendary trees bearing sweets and cakes. In an Oriya story the cowherd boy planted a cake called *Manda* and said, "If you do not germinate tomorrow, I shall cut you down with my uncle's knife." The cake germinated. The boy came next day and said, "If you do not grow up adequately tomorrow morning I shall cut you down with my uncle's knife". The tree grew up. The boy turned up again next day and said, "If you do not bear cake-like fruits tomorrow I will cut you down with my uncle's knife". The legendary tree bore innumerable fruits and permanently solved his food problem.

Besides the medicinal purposes for which the skin, the root, the leaves, the fruits, the flowers of the tree or plant are used it possesses magical power of curing disease. In that case the plant is uprooted by a man who knows charms. The patient suffering from fever and living at a great distance is cured. So the importance of plants from the point of utility cannot be exaggerated.

Plant worship in Orissa has been a natural phenomenon. Aborigines of Orissa worship *Buddhipallien,* the goddess of forest. If she is not worshipped properly, she devours all men and women of the forest. They also worship *Meghasani* who protects them at every step in the hazardous forest tract, infested with wild animals.

Bankamundi who makes procurement of prey easy in the forest is also worshipped.

We come across vermilion-painted trees almost in every village. They symbolise the local goddesses who save the village against the the attack of cholera, small-pox and other virulent diseases. They are worshipped with great care, pomp and splendour when cholera breaks out or rain fails.*

This paper was read at the All India Folklore Conference, Calcutta, 1964.*

Trilochan Pande

TREE-WORSHIP IN ANCIENT INDIA

Popular religion plays a vital role in the day-to-day life of the Indian people. This religion, in the widest sense of the term, has been and remains still one of the perennial sources of so many rituals, customs, beliefs, manners, in fact of the whole cultural pattern of this nation that stands in history for her unity in diversity. From the Austrics, the Dravidians and the Aryans onward various races have brought from time to time their own religious practices and ways of worship into the Indian soil and that is the reason why at times one gets bewildered in finding out the elements of animism and animalism mixed with those of pantheism and monotheism in this religion. The tree-cult stands a good testimony to this fact which forms one of the major aspects of popular religion in India .

The history of tree-worship in this country is essentially very old though it seems difficult now to trace its development through the ages. It becomes all the more complicated in the light of the assimilative nature of Indian religion. However, the cult seems to be a part of the Nature-Worship in the beginning. The aborigines and primitive peoples of this land must have been adoring the stars, the sky, the moon, the forests, the trees, the rivers etc., in their own ways and when the Aryans entered India through the northern mountains, they brought with them somewhat different concepts regarding the phenomena of nature. Then followed an admixture of religious practices and manners of worship which was bound to affect the society, in those days. In due course of time, this admixture was responsible to a great extent for developing a new pattern of popular religion. Under such circumstances, it was but natural for the Nature-Worship, including the tree-worship, to be influenced by diverse currents that are markable even today.

The tree-worship is traceable in the holy scriptures of ancient India including the 'Ramayana', the 'Mahabharata', the 'Bhagwat Gita', and the 'Puranas'. Planting and worshipping the trees was a marked feature in those days as rich harvest was always expected by afforestation. The trees were considered no less important in the prosperity of the country than the wealth and manpower. Our national government

has in a way revived this old practice now-a-days by observing the tree-plantation week during the rainy season. The practice of planting trees seems at least fifteen hundred years old as there falls a chapter in the 'Matsya Purana' which formulates the proper ceremony in this context. On being asked by learned sages, the narrator replies :—

"Clean the soil first and water it. Decorate trees with garlands, burn the 'guggual' perfume in front of them and place one pitcher filled with water by the side of each tree. As you offer prayers and oblation to the sacrificial fire, do likewise for the trees. By singing benedictive songs and reciting hymns from the 'Rig', 'Yajur', and 'Sam' Vedas then sprinkle holy water on trees from the pitchers kept nearby. Water the plants four times a day and offer oblation with the seeds of mustard, barley and those of the sesamum plant. Kindle fire from the *'Palash'* wood. After worshipping them in this way, celebrate the actual plantation. He, who plants even one tree, goes straight to the Heaven and obtains the highest perfection."

Trees were regarded indirectly the progenitors of mankind. At the beginning of the Creation there existed nothing but water and from water was created the Universe, as the 'Rig Veda' describes the scene. In the order of this creation trees also occupied a prominent place. The 'Brahma-Purana' gives an interesting account as to how inanimate trees became the forerunners of the human race.

Once the trees were so widespread that the creation of other beings came almost to a standstill. Lord Pracheta got furious at the sight and emitted Fire and Wind to destroy them. When all the trees began to disappear fast, the God Soma approached the Lord and requested him to be quiet. He offerd him *"Marisha"*, the daughter of trees, in marriage so that the world may grow and prosper. From *"Marisha"* was to be born Daksha Prajapati who is the well-known first father of mankind according to the Hindu system of mythology.

So the trees played an important part in the act of creation. With such a background it was natural for the trees to receive prayers and offerings from the people in those days.

II

Out of all trees and plants (more than thirty in number) worshipped all over the country at present, the worship of the holy Fig tree (*'Ashawatha'*), the Banyan tree (*'Bat'*), the Wood-Apple tree (*'Bel'*), the Plantain tree (*'Kadali'*) and that of the Basil Plant (*'Tulsi'*) appears to be the oldest. From ancient times these trees were widely known

for one property or the other, and they still occupy a prominent place either for religious sanctity or for practical utility.

Much importance was attached to the worship of the holy Fig tree i.e. the '*Ashwatha*' in the Vedas and later scriptures. The 'Atharva Veda' refers it as the permanent seat of the gods. Gods were, therefore, naturally revered by adoring the '*Ashwatha*'. In the 'Bhagwat Gita' it is said to be the incarnation of God Krishna himself. Among all the trees, Krishna says, He is the 'Ashwatha—

"Ashwathah sarva brikshanam devarshinam cha Narada
Gandharvanam Chitrarathah Sidhanam Kapilo munih."

The tree was highly considered benefactor of mankind by blessing barren women with sons. People in those days were concerned more with the power of fertility for their own protection and this tree was supposed to possess such a power. Hence it received wide popularity.

The Banyan tree ('*Bat*') was probably the most prolific tree in both the leaves and fruits. It was widely worshipped by the people of all castes and creeds. It was said to be the abode of many good spirits and according to popular belief, it manifested attributes of the God. At the time of the Deluge, the Eternal Power had transformed himself into the Banyan tree. The 'Brahma Purana' narrates how one sage Markendeya was much anxious at that time to find out a shelter while there was destruction everywhere. After meditating a great deal, he at last recognised that Eternal Power in the Banyan tree and then worshipped Him.—

"Praptwan tatpadam divyam mahapralaya karnam
Purushesmiti khyatam vatraj sanatanam."

When Lord Buddha attained perfection under the '*Bodhi*' tree (the Banyan tree) it became as godly as the Lord himself. People began to besmear the foot of the tree with vermilion after offering sweets and perfumes to it. Later, the famous Pauranic story of Savitri and Satyawan came to be associated with it which was one of the causes of its sacredness. Savitri had saved the life of her husband Satyawan from the hands of Death under the Banyan tree, so the tree also became an ideal object of worship specially among the women-folk of India.

The Wood-Apple tree ('*Bel*') was mainly associated with the Shaiva and Shakta cults. Its leaves were widely offered at the temples of Lord Shiva while its branches were worshipped during various ceremonies and festivals. Further, its wood was never burnt as the

house-fuel, being the sacred wood. The tree also possessed much medicinal value its use being advised in ailments of all kinds. Here the elements of sacredness and utility were both responsible to some degree for its popularity. According to a Pauranic narration a certain hunter who had kept 'Bel' leaves throwing over an idol of Lord Shiva throughout the night had received 'Moksha' i.e. the Enlightenment on the 'Bel' tree. Such stories were and are still helpful in the circulation of a certain cult.

The Basil plant (*'Tulsi'*) was widely planted and offered prayers in ancient India. Still its marriage is duly celebrated in the month of 'Kartik'. The plant is also called 'Vishnu-priya' meaning thereby the beloved of Lord Vishnu. This name throws some light on its life. It is said that the demon Jalandhar had a beautiful wife named Vrinda. Because of her chastity he had become an open threat to all gods and sages. Vishnu, therefore, resolved to crush him by deceiving his wife. Vrinda embraced a corpse by mistake and as a sequence, her husband was instantly defeated and eventually killed while fighting in the Heaven. Then cursing Lord Vishnu for this deception, she died with the corpse of her husband. Later, Vishnu realised his fault. Parvati, the goddess, had planted in the meantime a Basil plant in the funeral pyre of Vrinda. Vishnu, therefore, accepted Vrinda in the form of that plant, to be his life-long companion. This was a good reason for making the plant favourite with gods as well as with human beings. *

The Basil plant had also a medicinal aspect. There was a popular saying that wherever exists a *'Tulsi'* plant messengers of Death even do not dare to go there. No disease could approach the place where there was a Basil plant as the place was to become holy for ever due to its presence. In Indian houses still it is a tradition to give water mixed with the *'Tulsi'* to a dying person. It restores health by killing all the germs of diseases. Health and religion were inter-related in those far off days, as is evident from the worship of this plant. The following lines are often heard from the people living in villages :—

"Tulsi vipinasyapi samantat pawanam sthalam
Kroshmatram bhawatyewa gangenewa cha ambhasa."

Other trees were also popular due to one reason or other in religion and society of ancient India though their worship is doubtful.

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* There is is a flower bearing this name 'Vishnu-priya', in the Kumaon-Garhwal regions of the Himalayas which is offered to Lord Shiva, but it is different from *'Tulsi'*.

Nonetheless, they seem to have developed a cult of their own. Many gods were closely associated with them and their flowers, leaves etc., were useful on several occasion. The *'Ashoka'*, the *'Mandara'*, the *'Deodar'*, the *'Udumbar'*, the *'Parijat'* and *'Kadamba'* were some of the trees frequently mentioned in the Sanskrit literature.

The *'Ashoka'* tree was blessed to be immortal by Lord Shiva. His consort Parvati had worshipped him with the flowers of this tree, hence it was honoured by all. The tree stands evergreen and never grows old. It is said that it gets flowered if touched by handsome ladies. The *'Mandar'* was the coral tree, somewhat grey and yellow in colour. It was not very big as the poet Kalidasa mentions in his *'Megha Duta'*. Its flowers were easy to reach from the ground :—

"Tasyopante kritaktanyah kantaya vardhito me
Haste prapya stabak namito bal mandar brikshah."

The *'Deodar'* was the heavenly tree of gods that still grows in abundance in the Himalayan ranges. Sages and ascetics of those times used to observe penance under this tree. The *'Udumbar'* was the common Gular tree. Its wood was essentially needed by the Hindus at the time of the thread and marriage ceremonies. The *'Parijat'* tree is often referred in the 'Mahabharata'. It was one of the five trees of the Heaven but Lord Krishna had snatched it from the hands of Indra. The *'Kadamba'* tree used to blossom when there occurred thunder and rains. It was a favourite tree of Lord Krishna who used to remain standing in its shade while playing with his flute.

How these numerous trees got a footing in the popular religion of ancient India is a question difficult to answer at present, but there were some factors worth to be noticed, which were largely responsible for originating the tree-cult. Some of them may be as follows—

1. There was the common and practical utility of the trees. They provided shelter to the primitive men ; their wood, leaves, fruits, branches etc., were all useful to the members of his family in one way or the other. He naturally looked towards them as beneficient objects.

2. It was widely believed and is still believed, that trees are possessed by spirits both good and bad. Women used to approach the gods of the trees with desire of the son. In the temples of Bharhut, Gaya, Sanchi and Mathura, there are women, almost naked, engraved on the railings who stand under trees for the fulfilment of their earnest desires. Instances are not lacking when, at times, tree spirits used to

guide men and women in their distress. Such popular beliefs were certainly a step leading towards the worship of trees.

3. Then, there was the medicinal value of the trees. The common man could not afford to purchase medicine for cure but he got the advantage of the trees without any cost. Naturally he developed a respect for the trees.

It cannot be said, therefore, that there was only one factor wholly responsible for originating and developing the tree-worship in ancient India. All the factors, mentioned above, together with external influences and superstitions combined together to give a particular trend to the cult as it appears today.

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Pushker Chandervaker

TREE-CULT IN SAURASHTRA

In the cultural history of Man, the worship of trees has played an important role, because in the beginning of shaping, modelling, moulding and constructing his civilization, he was in constant touch with the nature's agents and agencies such as trees. In the beginning of civilization, Man took his inspiration for religion from trees, rivers, hills, mountains, the sun, the moon, the stars and other objects of nature. Thus tree-worship, in one or another form, is seen in all races of mankind, because "primitive man, observing the growth and death of trees, the elasticity of their branches, the sensitiveness and the annual decay and revival of their foliage, anticipated in his own way the tendency of modern science to bridge the gulf between the animal and the vegetable world."

It has been believed that the tree-worship, in India, is as old as the civilization of Mohen-jo-daro. As a result of it, in ancient India, and in the prehistoric days, it was prevalent in the Punjab, Sind and Baluchistan. In Buddhist literature, we get many references of tree-worship and tree cult in the *Jatak Kathas.* Boddhisatva is known in it as रुक्खएव देवता . There is a story of a merchant who sacrificed an animal to a banyan tree, before he left his house for trade-tour. The tree which was planted by Anand in Shravasti was worshipped by his followers. Kashiraj was advised to bring out the eyes of one hundred prisoner-princes by the family priest in the Buddhist period. Not only the banyan tree was taken as one of the holy trees but mango tree and bastard teak were considered as holy trees and they were worshipped in the country. Chaitya has often been mentioned in the Ramayan and the Mahabharat. In the 'Manu Smriti' Manu has advised dixits to bow their heads to the known trees and go on tours. In the 'Skanda Puran', *Ficus religiosa* gets importance for the worship. Thus in ancient India, *Ficus Indica,* banyan tree, bastard teak, *Ficus religiosa, Ocimum basilicum* are taken as holy and sacred. They all were worshipped.

Greek Philosophers (Aristotle, Plutarch) thought that trees had perceptions, passions and reasons. The beliefs of primitive man were part of a small stock of fundamental ideas which persist in one form

or another over a large portion of the world and have found a place in the higher religion.[1]

Ousley says : "Particular trees have been honoured in all ages, and . . . . . in all countries.[2]

Pliny says : "In old times, trees were the very temples of the gods : and according to that ancient manner, the plain and simple peasants of the country. . . . .do, at this day consecrate to one god or other, the goodliest and fairest Trees that they can meet with all. First and foremost, the ancient ceremony of dedicating this and that kind of Tree to several gods, as proper and peculiar upto them, was always observed and continued yet to this day."[3]

Mrs. J. H. Philpot says in "The Sacred Tree", "There is little doubt that most if not all races, at some period of their development, have regarded the tree as the home, haunt, or embodiment of a spiritual essence, capable of more or less independent life and activity, and able to detach itself from its material habitat and to appear in human or in animal form. This belief has left innumerable traces in ancient art and literature, and largely shaped the usages and legends of the peasantry and impressed its influence on the ritual of almost all the primitive religions of mankind. There is indeed scarcely a country in the world where the tree has not at one time or another been approached with reverence or with fear, as being closely connected with some spiritual potency."

Now why did human races pay so much respect to worship of tree ? J. J. Modi had seen two reasons for this belief.

(i) Firstly, such trees are very old trees, some of hundreds of years' standing and they are believed to have been the seats of 'holy men of former times' who had prayed and meditated under their shade. They are believed to have been miraculously preserved by god so many years, because they had afforded shade and shelter to his faithful servants. Then, as such miraculous trees, they are believed to possess the power of curing various diseases. Some of these trees may have been associated with the events of some of their great men.

(ii) Again, it seems, that some coincidence or accident attaches to a tree a sacred importance. A particular person may pray and take a vow under a certain tree for some particular object of his desire. That desire may be fulfilled and thenceforward holds that tree dear and sacred. Others carry on that idea and the tree becomes a sacred tree with many others.[4]

The above statements of Modi hold valid in connection with the beliefs of tree-worship in Saurashtra.

R. E. Enthoven, I. C. S. has written in "The Folklore Notes, Gujarat", (Vol. I, page 86) that, it is related by some people that in deserts trees are rare and the summer heat is oppressive. To the travellers passing through such deserts, the only place of rest is in the shadow of a solitary tree that is to be met occasionally. In order that no harm be done to such trees, some people have given currency to the belief that a spirit called *mamo* dwells in such trees and expects the offering of a rag and a pice at the hands of every passer-by.

He further states that, some are of opinion that the *bhuvas* in order to raise money from the credulous by terrifying them, daub tree within the limits of each village with the form of a trident and fix rags to it, stating that it is the abode of a *mamo* or a *pir*. At times they ask their clients to offer certain things to such trees, which they appropriate to themselves.

There is also a belief, that the holy trees that receive offerings of rags from travellers, are the abodes of gods or evil spirits and are distinguished from other trees of the same species by the epithet of *chithario*. Some hoist flags on such trees instead of offering rags.

Thus tree worship must be popular and must be very ancient in Saurashtra as in other states of India. A folksong[5] runs thus :

बोरडी रे बोरडी,
माना वीरनी गा गोरडी !
हुं पूजुं आकडो आकडो,
मारा वीरनी ढांढो वांकडो !
हुं पूजुं आवल बावल,
मारो ससरो रावल रावल !

Zaverchand Meghani has not given the name of the place from where this song has been collected. Otherwise, it would have been easier to locate the place in which part of Saurashtra all these trees—*Boradi* (jujube), *Akado* (swallow wart), *Aval* are being worshipped.

Not only these three trees and plants were believed as holy trees or plant but also there are nearly thirty trees and plants which are believed either incarnations or symbols of particular gods or deities. And at the same time there are certain places which are densely grown with trees and considered as the holiest. Near Porbandar at a distance of nearly fortyfive miles there is Madhavpur (Saurashtra) a minor port village where it is popularly believed that Lord Krishna married Rukhmani in Madhuvan. There are trees of *Kadamba, mangifera in-*

dica (Mango tree), *cocoa* (Nalieri), *Prosopis* (Shami) as well as *jambil.* This grove is also believed as a holy grove.

But each of the following tree is held individually as holy. 1. *Ambo* (Mango Tree) 2. *Ambli* (Tamarind) 3. *Akado* (Swallow wart) 4. *Asopalav* (Polyalthea longifolia) 5. *Asindro* (Bauhimnia parviflora) 6. *Babul* (acacia arabica) 7. *Bili* (Aegle marmelos) 8. *Champo* (Michelia champaka) 9. *Chandan* (Santalum album) 10. *Darba grass* (Poa cynocuroides) 11. *Kadamba* (Nauclea Kadamba) 12. *Karen* (Nerium odorum) 13. *Butea frondosa* (Bastard teak—Khakharo) 14. *Euphorbia tirucalli* (Milk bush—Kharsani) 15. *Melia Azadirachta* (Nim or Limbo) 16. *Nalieri* (Cocoa) 17. *Teespecia Populnea* (Palaspiplo) 18. *Ficus Religiosa* (Piplo) 19. *Pumpkin* (Sakarkolu) 20. *Prosopis spicigera* (Shami) 21. *Tulsi* or *Basil* (Ocimum Basilicum) 22. *Umber* (Ficus glomerata) 23. *Ficus Indica* (The India Fig tree—Vad) 24. Boradi. These trees are popularly worshipped in all parts of Saurashtra as well as those of Gujarat. It is a matter of emphasis, in some parts more, in some less, as for example, *Kevada* is not so much worshipped as it is being done in South Gujarat and Central Gujarat. *Kevada Trij* falls in the month of *Bhadrapada* and is observed on the third day of the first half of *Bhadrapada.* Lord Shiv was propitiated by Gauri on the day with leaves of *Kevada* tree. And so *Kavada* tree gets importance but in Saurashtra *Kevada trij* is not so enthusiastically observed as in Gujarat.

Saurashtra has many martial races and they are mostly different clans of the Rajputs. Shami has been linked with the folktale of the Pandavas. And so on the tenth day of *Aswin* Rajputs worship *Shami Tree.*

But some trees and plants symbolise particular gods or goddesses. *Tulsi* symbolizes the wife of Lord Krishna. There is a mythological tale connected with her. A great festival is observed in the whole of Saurashtra on the fifteenth day of *Kartik* (Nov.-Dec.) The *Tamarind* (Ambli) symbolizes the wife of Lord Brahma. But the symbol is not so popular as that of *Tulsi-Vranda,* wife of Shaligram.

Piplo (Ficus religiosa) symbolizes Lord Vishnu. अश्वत्थ: सर्व बृक्षाणम्: 'I am Ashvath in tree world' is the saying of Lord Krishna in the Holy Geeta. This tree is worshipped in *Kartik, Chaitra, Shravan, Bhadarvo,** i.e., the months which are sacred to Vishnu. While the Indian fig tree *Vad* (Ficus Indica) is held sacred because it symolizes Lord Shiva.

Some of the trees mentioned here have been sung in stories—either of *Purans* or in mythological folktales. *Tulsi* has a folktale.

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* November-December, April-May, August-September, September-October.

Some trees are worshipped in Saurashtra because they are believed to be the places of shelters of some local gods, deities or goddesses. *Boradi* is considered holy because the goddess of small-pox takes its shelter under the *boradi tree*. 'The deities of the forest reside in groves or near the *Piludi* tree to which their devotees must go in order to fulfil their vows. These deities do not receive any formal worship. But they are noted for the cure of certain diseases and the groves which they haunt are frequently visited by afflicted persons'. It is also believed that on the seventh day of the second half of *Shravan,* the goddess of small-pox comes to stay in the hearth. In the hearth small plants or saplings either of cotton seeds, or the mango tree are planted and so they are taken as holy plants and are worshipped by folk of Gujarat. A. M. T. Jackson has noted : 'It is believed by some people that the spirit of a Mohammedan saint living or dead, dwells in such trees as the Khijado i.e. *Shami* (Prosopis spicigera) and *Baval* i.e. *Babul* (Acacia arabica). It is known by the name of Chitharia that is the ragged Pir. It is a common belief that if a mother fails to offer a rag or piece of cloth to such a holy tree while passing by it, her children run the risk of falling ill. Women and ignorant people therefore, make a point of offering rags to such trees whenever they happen to pass by them.

According to another belief, travellers in order to accomplish their journey fasely, offer rags to the *Khijado, Baval* or *Limbo* (Nim) trees as they are reputed to be the residences of spirits, if they happen to be on their way.

Some believe that both male and female spirits reside in the *Khijado, Baval* and *Kevada* tree and throw rags over them with the object of preventing passers-by from cutting or removing the trees. Some pile stones round their trunks and draw tridents over them with red lead and oil. If superstitious people come across such trees, they throw pieces of stones on the piles, believing them to be holy places and think that by doing so they attain the merit of building a temple or a shrine. A belief runs that this pile should grow larger and larger day by day and not be diminished. If the base of such a tree is not marked by a pile of stones, rags only are offered ; and if rags are not available, the devotee tears off a piece of his garment, however costly it may be, and dedicates it to the tree.

Once a child saw its mother offering a rag to such a tree, and asked her the reason of the offering. The mother replied that her brother, that is the child's maternal uncle, dwelt in the tree. Hence a belief arose that a Chithario (ragged) uncle dwells in such trees. Others

assert that the Chithario pir dwells in such trees and they propitiate him by offering cocoanuts and burning frankincense before it.

Some declare that travellers fix rags of worn-out clothes to the trees mentioned above in order that they may not be attacked by the evil spirits residing in them. Another belief is that the spirits of deceased ancestors residing in such trees get absolution through this form of devotion. It is also believed that a goddess called *Chitharia Devi* resides in such trees and being pleased with these offerings, blesses childless females with children and cures persons suffering from itch of their disease. There is further belief that ragged travellers, by offering pieces of their clothes to the *Khijado, Baval* or *Kevada* trees are blessed in return with good clothes.

Some believe that Hanuman, the Lord of Spirits resides in certain trees. They call him Chithario or ragged Hanuman. All passers-by offer rags to the trees inhabited by him. Sometimes the abodes of Hanuman are found either under a *Shami* tree or under a tamarind tree. Hence these trees are taken as holy trees.

Late Zaverchand Meghani had collected folktales of Gujarat, in two volumes entitled "Kamkavati" in which he has given folk-tales of certain plants and trees such as *Tulsi* plant, *Kevada,* etc. Nearly thirty trees and plants are worshipped in Saurashtra because of various reasons which are connected with folk beliefs on local deities or gods or having its roots in *Puranas* or other books of Hindu mythology. But there are definite reasons why such trees are being propitiated in Gujarat and Saurashtra. But to understand Man, one has to understand his relation with the plant world as well as that of trees. The age of reasoning, the age of science and the age of intellectual pursuit may isolate Man from the tree-world, but the historian of social evolution of mankind cannot afford to do it because he is fully conscious that trees and plants have fully protected Man when he found himself in the midst of dangers.

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Pradyot Kumar Maity

TREE WORSHIP AND ITS ASSOCIATION WITH THE SNAKE CULT IN INDIA

The present article is an attempt to trace the history of the association of the tree cult with snake cult. Tree worship is an ancient cult among many races of the world.[1] But the cult has played a great role in the religious history of India from the time of the Indus Valley culture[2] to the modern times. From the archaeological and inscriptional data we have come to know that all kinds of trees were not worshipped. Those worshipped primarily include the *Pipal* (Ficus Religiosa), *Nim* (Melia Azadirachta), *Jack* (Artocarous Integrigolius) and a plant of the family of Euphorbiaceae (Snuhi in Sanskrit). But the Bhavisya Purana[3] gives a long list of the trees which are the *Pipal,* the Banyan or *Vata, Asoka, Arka, Sami* (Acacia), the *Durva grass, Padma, Amra* (Mango), *Nim, Bakula* (Embli myrobalam), *Srivriksha* (Bilva), *Karavira, Tulsi plant* (Basil) etc. In the same text it is also found that the *Pipal* or *Asvattha* tree is sacred to Siva or Krishna, the *Vata* to Kala, the *Bilva* and the *Asoka* to Siva, the *Arka* to the Sun, *Sami* who was goddess herself and the *Durva* to Ganesha. Thus it is rightly observed by Father Heras that "very often the tree cult was accidentally or essentially connected with other objects of worship".[4] One such example is the connection of the snake cult with the tree cult which is the subject of our present study.

The early association of snakes and trees can be traced back to the Indus Valley period.[5] A scene on a pottery found at Mohenjo-Daro, gives an idea of such association. On one side, there is a kneeling figure holding some object in hands and a tree. On the other side, there are a snake reclining on a low platform or dais, a tree and two pictographic signs.[6] Mackay remarks that the kneeling figure is evidently offering to a tree deity.[7] This scene also suggests the early association of the tree cult with the snake cult or vice versa. In the Buddhist legend and mythology of India "the tree deities were called Nagas, and were able at will . . . to assume the human form ; and in one story the spirit of a banyan tree who reduced the merchants to ashes is called a Naga-raja, the soldiers he sends forth from his tree are the Nagas, and the tree itself is the dwelling-place of the Naga".[8]

In connection with the legend of Buddha and Munchilinda, Vogel writes : "It is a point of some interest that in the earliest version of this legend which is preserved in the Pali canon mention is made of a Muchilinda-tree which is not spoken of in the later sources. Evidently there is some connection between the Naga Muchilinda and the tree of the same name under which the Buddha was seated May we therefore assume that in the ancient story the Naga was conceived as a tree-spirit ? Such an assumption is all the more plausible as in a Buddhist birth-story we read of a huge banyan-tree which is haunted by Nagas".[9]

The observation of Vogel deserves special consideration if we trace the relationship of the snakes or a snake deity with the tree cult in the later period. Evidence of the association of the tree cult with the animal worship is not lacking in history.[10] From a careful study of the literature and the present day way of worship of the snakes it is clear that there are certain trees which are closely associated with the snake cult. The early literary evidence, so far as it is known to us, is the work of Jimutavahana's Kalaviveka which has been assigned by P. V. Kane[11] to not later than about 1400 A.D. where it is said that "on the fifth day when the lord Janardana goes to bed in the courtyard of the house, the goddess Manasa, placed (at the foot of) the Snuhi tree, should be worshipped. Leaves of Pichumardda (*Nim*) should be placed in the interior of the house (temple ?). After worshipping the goddess, a man gets no fear from snakes".[12] A similar description has been quoted by Raghunandana.[13] He also refers to a *sankalpa* in the following words : "On the fifth day of the dark half of the month of Sravana in order to get rid of the danger from snakes one should make a resolve (*Sankalpa*) by announcing his gotra and name and saying that he intends to worship the goddess in the form of a Snuhi tree and if one is not available, with a pot and water."[14] The Brahmavaivarta Purana states : "whoever on the last day of Ashadha invokes the goddess (Manasa) in the form of a twig of Guda tree[15] and worship her with devotion ; and whoever sacrifices (*animals ?*) on the fifth *tithi* known as Manasa *tithi*, will definitely be blessed with wealth, sons and fame."[16] The 15th century Bengali poet of *Manasa-Kavya* written in honour of the snake-goddess Manasa records that "the goddess is to be worshipped in the form of a golden pot containing water with a twig of *Sij* over the mouth of it".[17] In the version of the 16th century Assamese poet Manakar occurs the following : "Vishahari is worshipped wholeheartedly (by the people) in the form

of an earthen pot, containing a twig of Siju (*Sij*) by offering lotuses in the rainy season".[18]

The evidence cited above clearly proves the association of the snake goddess—*Manasa* with the *Snuhi* or *Sij* and *Nim* trees. This association with the particular species of trees seems to have originated from their practical utility. The *Snuhi tree* which has curative qualities for a variety of diseases especially against poison, is mentioned in Bhava Prakasa,[19] a mediaeval work on Hindu medicine where the Bengali equivalent of the *Snuhi tree* is given as *Sij* or Manasa tree. Possibly when the *Snuhi tree* was used against snake-bite, this association with the goddess of snakes came into vogue. Though this tree is not used now-a-days as an antidote against poison-healing, its earlier association with the goddess is not forgotten. Besides other methods of the worship of Manasa, she is emblematically worshipped in the form of the *Sij tree,*[20] which is therefore also known as the Manasa tree in Bengali. From the field survey it has been known that this form of worship is no less prevalent in West Bengal than the worship of the earthen image, and is particularly popular among the womenfolk, who often plant twigs of *Sij* mostly on the Dasahara on the courtyard or in the *Tulsi-tala* (a place where a sacred Basil tree is permanently planted) and worship them throughout the rainy season or on the days of *Manasa* worship. In many places of the districts of Bankura and Birbhum the planted twigs of *Sij* are allowed to grow for a few months and on the day of the immersion of the image of *Durga* in Asvina Kartika (Oct-Nov-December) these are uprooted and thrown into water. As already observed in the versions of Bipradas and Manakar, it is said that *Manasa* is worshipped in the form of pot and a twig of *Sij.* Thus the twig of *Sij,* which was worshipped together with the pot in the early period, has become an independent emblem in the present day worship in Bengal. With the expansion of the cult both the early emblems of the goddess—the pots and the twig of *Sij*—have been found representing her independently. The reference to the *emblematic* representation of the goddess *Manasa,* as already observed, are found in the different Sanskrit texts which evidently record the developed phase of the cult. Of course, in some places, both emblems are used, since they are easily available, though generally one or other is used alone. The sacredness of this tree is traced back to the Indus Valley period as it is rightly observed by Mackay.[21]

The reference to the use of the leaves of the *Nim* tree at the worship of *Manasa* in the early mediaeval period suggests that this tree came to be associated with the snake cult as "its leaves are supposed

to repel snakes and they are eaten to cure various ailments".[22] This tree whose sanctity may be traced back to the Indus Valley period is still considered as sacred in most parts of India.[23] Anyway its relation with *Manasa* is no longer found. But in South India stone images of snakes are placed at the foot of the *Nim* trees and worshipped.[24]

Manasa who had her origin in the 9th-10th centuries A.D., in Bengal and later on, spread in Bihar and Assam[25] is commonly worshipped near a tree or bush which may be a *Sij,* a Banyan, a *Pipal* or a *Tulsi* planted either in the courtyard or very close to the house. In a group worship or *baroyari-puja* the goddess is worshipped in a particular place in the village square under a big tree which is mostly a *Pipal* or a Banyan. Even in the city of Calcutta this type of worship is current. Under the big tree is found a *Sij* tree which is treated in most cases as an integral part of the *Manasa* worship. In Assam a twig of *Sij* is invariably used at her worship along with other emblems.

In South India special temples or *Kavus*[26] which are groves of trees, are specially made for snakes to live in. These are popularly called 'snake groves' and are commonly found in many places of South India in general and in Malabar they occur in almost every Hindu house.[27] These groves are often found in the south-eastern corner of the house but the exception is rare. The most common trees found in these groves are *Ungoo* (Bauhinia Variegata) and *Kanjeram* (Strychnos Nuxvomica) ; other trees may also be found there. Sometimes these trees are entwined by different species of forest vines. The whole grove is considered as sacred and the prejudice against cutting trees therefrom is strongly maintained.[28]

Different legends are current in South India relating to the origin of snake groves. It is observed by C. K. Menon : "According to the *Kerala Ulpathi,* a book of great renown in the country, the district of Malabar along with Cochin, Travancore South and a part of North Canara, extending from Comorin to Gokarnam, distance of 640 miles north to south, was reclaimed from the sea by Sri Parasurama and colonized by him. This great man was an *Avatar* of Vishnu, to destroy the cruel Kshatriya Rajahs, who succeeded a noble line of sovereigns of the warrior caste. He carried out his object by destroying the warrior chiefs twentyone times. The sin of killing brave men, though cruel, was too much even for this incarnation of Vishnu. He therefore retired to Gokarnam in North Canara, and there invoked Varuna, the lord of the waters, to give him some land. Varuna accordingly went back a few miles, and 646 miles of land, called Keralam, came into existence. Images of the god were then fixed in 108 places

and the pioneer brought Brahman settlers from the north of India to colonize the new country. But these settlers all ran away, after the stay of a few months, for fear of serpents of which the country was full. The land was then for sometime in the possession of serpents. That his labours may not be in vain Sri Parasurama brought in a further contingent of Brahmans from the north. He then divided the country into sixtyfour Brahmanical colonies . . . and advised his men to regard the snakes as their household gods, and to reserve special places in the land he had already parcelled out amongst them for the snakes and offerings began to be made systematically, and the country became free from the fear of snakes. Such in brief is the traditional account for the appearance in large numbers of snake groves in Kerala."[29]

There is a very important *Kavu* or snake grove of Mannarsala in Central Travancore. The *Kavu* and its premises cover about 16 acres. In the middle of it are two small temples dedicated to the snake king and queen who are believed to live there with their followers. There are thousands of snakes of granite, representing the various followers of the king and queen. The *Kavu* has large endowments of landed property from the income of which an annual festival known as Ayilyam is celebrated in the months of *Kanny* and *Trulam* (September and October). This *Kavu* is owned by a Nampiathy or Nambiyadi who performs the worship. On the day before the annual festival, the temple authorities spend a sum roughly amounting three thousand rupees in feeding the Brahmans. A large crowd assemble at the festival of Ayilyam but most of them are women who have not conceived and are desirous to have children.[30] Two legends are current relating to the origin of this *Kavu* or grove.

1. It is observed by S. Krishna Iyer that "the land from Avoor on the south to Alleppy on the north was the site of the Khandava forest celebrated in the Mahabarata ; that when Arjuna set fire to it, the serpents fled in confusion and reached Mannarasalay, and there prayed to the gods for protection ; that thereupon the earth around was miraculously cooled down, and hence the name num-I-ari-I-sala, the place where the earth was cooled. After the serpents found shelter from the Khandava fire, an ancestress of the Nambiathy had a vision calling upon her to dedicate the groves and some land to the Naga Raja (snake-king), and build a temple therein. These commands were obeyed forthwith, and thenceforward the Naga Raja became their family deity."[31]

2. The Travancore State Manual records that "a member of this

Mannarsala illam * married a girl of the Vettikod illam, where the serpents were held in great veneration. The girl's parents, being very poor, had nothing to give in the way of dowry, so they gave her one of the stone idols of the serpent, of which there were many in the house. The girl took care of this idol, and worshipped it regularly. Soon she became pregnant, and gave birth to a male child and a snake. The snake child grew up, and gave rise to a numerous progeny. They were all removed to a spot where the present Kavu (grove) is."[32]

Besides the preservation of *Kavu* or snake groves as a part of serpent worship in South India, stone images of snakes are placed at the foot of different trees and worshipped.[33] In Mysore, "the stones bearing the sculptured figures of serpents near every village are always erected under certain trees, which are most frequently built round with a raised platform, on which the stones are set up, facing the rising sun. One is invariably a sacred figure, which represents a female, and another a margosa, which represents a male ; and these two are married with the same ceremonies as human beings. The *bilpatra* (aegle marmelas), sacred to Siva, is often planted with them."[34] Similar is the case with other parts of South India.[35] The Gauria snake-charmers of the Central Provinces are believed to cure snake-bite by an appeal to the *Bilva* tree (aegle marmelos) and to Dhanvantari, the Physician of the gods.[36]

The association of the tree in general and the snake seems to have originated for two reasons—the intrinsic sanctity of the tree in Indian mind and the fact that trees are considered to be one of the places of residence of snakes. The latter belief is strongly held by South Indians, who carefully preserve snake-groves for the residence of snakes. But the particular association of the snake-goddess Manasa with the *Sij* tree seems to have originated for the poison-healing quality of this tree. Thus it is learnt that the association of the tree cult with the snake cult is of far remote antiquity in India and that it is still prominent in many parts of India. We can also safely conclude that in some cases snakes were worshipped as tree spirits as it is observed by Vogel.[37]

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B. L. Desai

TREE WORSHIP IN GUJERAT

Plants are the oldest associates of Man. If there were no trees, our life on this planet would come to an end. Man depends upon plants for his food, beverages, drugs, adhesives, dyes, oils, paper, rubber, furniture and what not ! One cannot imagine life and pleasure without the aid of plants. It is no wonder, therefore, that trees are looked upon as universal divine gift In Gujerat trees are worshipped for devotional, medicinal and supernatural purposes. In a number of religious ceremonies trees have a place of honour. It is a common belief that he who cuts a banyan tree or a pippal tree never gets a son. Also he who crosses a Gloriosa plant will have a quarrel in store for him. Some trees are considered absolutely holy and common belief forbids their use as firewood. In this paper it is proposed to treat plants of worship in Gujerat.

1. Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*)—This is a plant of all-India worship. There are two varieties known as *Ram Tulsi* and *Krishna Tulsi* the former being white and the latter black. There is a puranic story that a king named Jalandhara coveted the seat of Indra. He had a boon that as long as his queen Vrinda would remain chaste no one could kill him. He went to war with Indra and would have vanquished him ; but while the battle was being fought Krishna took the form of Jalandhara and sported with Vrinda. Jalandhara was then killed and Vrinda became a Sati. At that spot a plant grew and this is *Tulsi*. The Vaishnavas consider this plant as the most holy. They wear garland of *Tulsi* beads and carry rosary of *Tulsi*. Some of the devoted pilgrims of Dwarika shrine plant *Tulsi* plant in their palm of hand and with it cover their entire pilgrimage. Dried *Tulsi* plant accompanies the dead on his last journey. In dark eleventh day of the month of Kartika (October-November) Tulsi-Krishna marriage is performed. Rukmini was the most beloved queen of Shri Krishna. Narada wanted to take her to Heaven. So the rest of the queens became agitated and they all consented to give Narada Krishna's weight of gold if he postponed the idea of taking Rukmini to Heaven. Narada wanted to test them. So he agreed to their offer. The queens began to deposit all their golds. But with all their gold the pans would not move. At this

time Rukmini, who had no gold ornaments, came and put a leaf of *Tulsi* in the pan. And the pan moved to balance Krishna. It is said since that time Tulshi-Krishna marriage is celebrated. Image of Vishnu is worshipped with *Tulsi* leaf and sandal paste. There is also a custom to perform the marriage of *Tulsi* plant with Pippal tree (Ficus religiosa). Oaths are taken with leaves of *Tulsi* in palms.

2. Pippal (*Ficus religiosa*)—This is a very big tree and one often sees it near the shrine of Siva. It is said to be the abode of *Nagas* (snakes). Siva is fond of snakes, its *linga* is covered with snake hood and probably this association of snakes with this tree has made it holy. Young girls perform the worship of this tree on some holy days. There is a saying, "she has watered the Pippal tree," which means she is has done something pious ; and there is another saying, "she has done (worshipped) *Tulsi* and *Pippal,*" meaning she has done much good work. Dried branches of this tree are used in sacrifice. "Ghost resides in Pippal" is a saying in Gujerat. Many places are named after this tree.

3. Banyan Tree (*Ficus Indica*)—This is a very big tree expanding by means of its aerial roots. Sometimes it can cover acres of space as in Sibpur and Kabir Vad trees. On an island of the Narbada River there is a big banyan tree. There is a myth that Saint Kabir chewed a twig of banyan and from this grew a big tree named after. Poet Dalpatram has described it as a mountain, if looked through fog. People worship it and go to it for pilgrimage. It is common belief that this tree should never be felled, lest one may have no son. By common practice its use as firewood is forbidden. Probably its huge size and shade have made it a tree of worship.

4. Sami Tree (*Proospis spicigera*)—This is yet another holy tree, worshipped mostly by the Rajputs. On the Dassera (10th of Aswin) Rajputs perform Sami Puja with their arms and great pomp. They go in procession, seek strength and protection and return home. Puranic story says that Pandavas had hidden their arms on this tree before they went into exile. Sami twigs are burnt in sacrificial *Vedi* and the word "Samidha" is used for them. When a man has lost his first three wives and wants to go in matrimony once again, he first performs marriage with Sami tree with full Brahmanical rites and then takes his fourth wife. It is believed that fourth marriage is always futile and hence the futility is averted by this practice. When the marriage party leaves its village limits, the bridegroom puts his garland on sami tree. Some people of aboriginal tribes make offerings to this tree and

believe they will reach their ancestors. Ahirs or shepherds believe that Gods reside in this tree and hence they do not cut it.

5. Bili Tree (*Aegle marmelos*)—Since very ancient times this has been associated with Phallus worship. Its leaves are offered to *lingam* of Siva especially in the month of Sravana (July-August) for seeking long life and protection from calamity. Its leaves have essential oil glands. Its name is derived from *Bil* meaning a passage. Its dry fruit are turned into toys. It is a favourite tree of Lord Siva and although the tree itself is not worshipped, no worship of Siva is complete without its leaves. Some costal towns are named after this tree, e.g., Bilpodi, Bili, etc.

6. Palasha or Khakharo (*Bulea Frondosa*)—Its another name is Kimshuka meaning, it is a parrot? This tree is a glory of summer. It is called Bastard teak. Rajputs of Gujerat worship this tree and consider it holy. Rajput boys and girls are taken to this tree for worship, their hairs are cut and there is a big feast. This is the coming of age ceremony among them. Before marriage Khakhara worship has to be gone through. Its twig is used in thread ceremony.

7. Jowar (*Sorghum vulgare*)—This is a grain plant. On *Naga Panchami* day this plant is worshipped along with the picture of snake drawn on the wall. On Dassera the plant is placed on house roof.

Aboriginal tribes of Gujerat are worshippers of ancestral dead. For this the common practice is to establish "Khatri" for freeing themselves from body ailments. This consists of placing bell-shaped earthen vessels near the trunk of Pippal, Sami or Rayan tree and performing periodical worship there.

Plants are worshipped where they are required for medicinal use. In cases of fever the witch doctor seeks the use of Khapat (*Abutiton asiaticum*) or Dhaturra (*Datura stramonium*). At twilight he goes near the plant, places few grains of rice and lights a ghee lamp. The plant is requested to lend its leaves for the cure. Early morning the leaves are picked and its juice is administered to the patient.

In worship Gods have their own preference. *Siva* is worshipped with flowers of *Datura* and Karan or sweet Oleander (*Nerium oleander*) and leaves of Bili Tree. Hanuman has preference for Arka flowers (*Calatropis procera*). Vishnu likes Tulsi leaves and Durba. Lotus flowers with long stalks are placed before Siva Lingam. Goddesses like marigold flowers and this flower is in great demand during *Navaratra festival* in Aswin (September-October). Leaves of Kevada are offered to Siva on Kevada Trija. Kevada is a sweet-smelling hedge plant growing on the west coast where Siva worshippers abound. One of our marriage

song begins सुर रग्या रे केवडीआनी फनसे के वाणीरां भलाँ वायां— Behind the hedge of Kevada, the sun has arisen and a fine morn is born—Kevada leaves adorn the hair of maidens gay.

Vaidya Manorama says, "O milk of swallow wort, I bow to thee. Where you are not available I shun that country." Charaka advises the use of *Bili* wood cot for labour room. If concoction of Bili roots is taken after repeating Shri Sukta of Rigveda, it gives a life of ten thousand years. Our physicians and religious teachers have considered the plant kingdom with great reverence. They have invoked the vegetation for peace of mankind. Sage Dadhichi gave up his life for the good of gods and his son, sage Pippalad was entrusted to be brought up to a Pippal tree. Umber tree (*Ficus glomerata*) is worshipped by barren women. It is said that the use of the powdered bark parasite of this tree, if taken with goat's milk, gives the gift of a son. Creeper of Momordica is worshipped with clods of earth in rain-inducing ritual.

It will be seen from the above that tree worship springs from man's long association with plants. They supply his needs, give food and cater to his comfort. They have ever been a source of affectionate reverence. One poet has sung वृक्षनसे मतले मनवा— Man shape your behaviour like plants. They have a lesson for us—Be good to those who trouble you and that is why they are worshipped.

K. N. Sahay

TREE-CULT IN TRIBAL CULTURE

The tree-cult or tree-worship is as old as our scriptures and as widely practised as to become almost a universal phenomena in the religious life of the people. On a prehistoric level also we are apt to get a few evidences of tree-worship. The most well known of them perhaps, are the relics found at Mohenjodaro and Harappa in the shape of "a sealing which bears a representation of a female from whose womb a plant issues and suggests the idea of an earth-goddess concerned with vegetation" and another, showing a deity in the branches of the sacred fig-tree or *pipal,* still regarded as a holy tree by the Hindus (Pigott : 1952 : 201-202). While in the first we find an association of a plant with a deity and its worship, the second is an obvious case of tree-worship.

In "The Golden Bough", Frazer (1950) who devotes several chapters on the worship of trees has given a variety of such examples from the Aryan race in Europe, and India, Australia, America, Africa, East Indies, China, Japan, Newzeland and such other places showing different shades of beliefs and diverse types of rituals or other customs and practices associated with different species of trees. Among the Celts the Oak-worship of the Druids is quite well known. Their old word for a sanctuary appears to be identical in origin and meaning with the Latin *nemus* meaning a grove which still survives in the name of Nemi. Sacred groves were common among the ancient Germans and tree-worship still survives among them at the present day. At Upsala, the old religious capital of Sweden, there was a sacred grove in which every tree was regarded as divine. The heathen Slavs also practised tree and grove-worship. Proofs of the prevalence of tree-worship in ancient Greece and Italy are found in abundance. In the sanctuary of Aesculapins at Cos, it was forbidden to cut down the cypress-trees. Its breach lead to a penalty of a thousand drachms. Among the tribes of the Finish-Ugrian stock in Europe the heathen worship was performed for the most part in sacred groves which were always enclosed

with a fence. The central point of the grove, at least among the tribes of the Volga, was the sacred tree. "Before it the worshippers assembled and the priest offered his prayers, at its roots, the victim was sacrificed, and its boughs sometimes served as a pulpit". The Hidatsa Indians of North America believe that every natural object has its spirit or shade to which due respect is given. Accordingly the shade of the cottonwood is believed to possess an intelligence which if properly approached may help the Indians in certain undertakings. Iroquois believed that each species of tree, shrub, plant, and herb had its own spirit, and to these spirits it was their custom to return thanks. The Wanika of Eastern Africa believe that every tree, and especially every coconut tree has its spirit. The destruction of a coconut tree is regarded as equivalent to matricide because that tree gives them life and nourishment as a mother does to her child. Trees that bleed and utter cries of pain or indignation when they are hacked or burned, occur very often in Chinese books. Old peasants in some parts of Austria have belief that forest trees are animate and will not allow an incision to be made in the bark without any special cause. It is said that the trees feel the cut not less than a wounded man his hurt. In felling a tree, they first beg its pardon. The Basogas of Central Africa believe that when a tree is cut down, the angry spirit which inhabits it may cause the death of the chief and his family. To prevent this disaster they consult a medicine-man before felling a tree. The Dieri tribe of Central Australia regard as very sacred certain trees which are believed to be their fathers transformed and thus they speak with reverence of these trees and take care to see that they are not cut or burnt. Some of the Philippine Islanders also have a similar belief that the souls of their ancestors reside in certain trees which they must spare. The spirits take up their abode, generally in tall and stately trees with great spreading branches. The Coreans believe that the souls of people who die of the plague or by the roadside or a woman who dies in childbed, invariably take up their abode in trees. To such spirits offerings of cake, wine and pork are made on heaps of stones piled under the trees. In China, it has been customary to plant trees on graves in order to strengthen the soul of the deceased and the trees that grow on graves are sometimes identified with the souls of the departed (Frazer : 1950 : 109-115).

Idea behind the Tree-Cult :

Frazer (1950 : 111-120) while examining the notions behind tree

and plant worship mainly talks about two types of opinions. According to the first, the savage believed that the world in general was animate, and trees and plants were no exception to this rule. He thought that they had souls like his own and he treated them accordingly. For him, felling a tree was similar to that of killing a sheep or an ox. This point can be substantiated from a number of examples of tree-worship, its reverence or other associated beliefs among the people like Hidatsa Indians, Iraquois, Wanika and Chinese as mentioned above.

But, however, such spirits of vegetation are not always treated with deference and respect. If fair words and kind treatment do not move them, stronger measures are sometimes resorted to. The durian-tree of the East Indies bears a fruit of the most delicious flavour. The Malayas cultivate it for the sake of its fruit and have been known to resort to peculiar ceremony for the purpose of stimulating its growth. One of the local sorcerors takes a hatchet and delivers several shrewed blows on the trunk of the barren tree saying, "Will you now bear fruit or not? If you do not I shall fell you". To this the tree replies through the mouth of another man who had climbed a mangostin-tree hard by, "Yes, I will now bear fruit. I beg you not to fell me". In Japan also to make trees bear fruit two men go into an orchard. One of them climbs up a tree and the other stands at the foot with an axe. The man with the axe asks the tree whether it will yield a good crop next year and threatens to cut it down if it does not. To this, the man among the branches replies on behalf of the tree that it will bear abundantly. One can find its exact parallels in Europe, as the present author could find during his field-work also among the Oraons of Chotanagpur. When I was working at village Jaipur, it was reported that Injlo Lakra had a new jack-fruit tree but it did not bear any fruit. It was further said that in the Hindi month of *Kartik* (October-November), one night after the people had taken their meals, a friend of Injlo climbed on the jack-fruit tree. Injlo remained near the root of the tree holding an axe in his hand. The latter acted as if he was going to chop off the tree. His friend climbing on the tree spoke on behalf of the tree, "Don't cut me. I shall bear fruits hence-forth". After speaking it he got down and the process was over. It was said that the tree began to yield plenty of fruit afterwards (Sahay : 1963 : 127-28).

The conception of trees and plants as animated beings further result in treating them as male and female who can be married to each other. There is a belief that like animals, plants also have their sexes and reproduce their kind by the union of the male and female elements.

The Maoris are said to have been acquainted with the sex of trees and have distinct names for the male and female of some trees. In the Moluccas, when the clove trees are in blossom, they are treated like pregnant women. No noise should be made near them and no light or fire should be carried past them at night. All these precautions are observed otherwise the tree would be alarmed and bear no fruit, or would drop its fruit too soon. Belief in the sex of a tree and its marriage with another tree or with a person may also be found being practised by a number of Hindus and tribal people either during the course of the marriage ceremonies of a person or before eating its first fruit.

So far, we have viewed the spirit as incorporated in the tree. Since it animates the tree, it must suffer and die with it. But according to another type of opinion, the tree is not the body, but merely the abode of the tree-spirit which in some cases can quit it and return to it at pleasure. The cases of Dieri tribe, Philippine Islanders and Chinese as mentioned above, and belief behind a sacred grove and the rituals connected with it may substantiate this viewpoint. Sacred-grove, as we know, consists of a bunch of old trees, generally at the outskrits of the village, left at the time of clearing the forest by the original settlers of the village. Since a forest is believed to be inhabited by various spirits and deities and its clearing involves a disturbance to them, such a grove is left for their abode and periodical sacrifice and offering are made to them by the villagers during festivals and other occasions. This tradition of sacred grove can be found among a number of tribes of Bihar and other places.

Thus, as soon as a tree comes to be viewed as an abode of the tree-spirit, the latter begins to change his shape and assume the body of a man, in virtue of a general tendency of early thought to clothe all abstract spiritual beings in concrete human form. He is believed to enjoy a certain right of possession or lordship over the trees, and ceasing to be a tree-soul, becomes a forest-god. The powers which he exercised as a tree soul incorporate in a tree, he still continues to wield as a god of trees. Frazer (1950 : 118) says and illustrates that trees considered as animate beings are credited with the power of making the rain to fall, the sun to shine, the crops to grow, flocks and herds to multiply, and blessing the women with offspring, and exactly the same powers are attributed to tree-gods conceived as anthropomorphic beings or as actually incarnate in living men.

It would be relevant to mention in the present context that the primitive people believed in the influence of the sexes on vegetation and

in many parts of the world, they have consciously employed the intercourse of the sexes as a means to ensure the fruitfulness of the earth. The Pipiles of Central America kept apart from their wives for four days before they committed the seed to the earth in order that on the night before planting, they might indulge their passions to the fullest extent. Certain persons are even said to be appointed to perform the sexual act at the very moment when the first seeds were deposited in the ground. The use of their wives at that time was enjoined upon the people by the priests as a religious duty, in default of which it was not lawful to sow the seed. In some parts of Amboyna, when it appears that the clove crop is likely to be scanty, the men go naked to the plantations by night, and there seek to fertilise the tree precisely as they would impregnate women while at the same time they would call out for "More Cloves". The Bagandas of Central Africa believe so strongly in the intimate relation between the intercourse of the sexes and the fertility of the ground that among them a barren wife is generally sent away as she is supposed to prevent her husband's garden from bearing fruit. On the contrary, a couple who have given proof of extraordinary fertility by becoming the parents of twins are believed by the Bagandas to be endowed with a corresponding power of increasing the fruitfulness of the plantain-trees which furnish them with staple food (Frazer : 1950 : 135-37).

Max Müller's theory of Naturism which explains the origin of religion by saying that the earliest form of religion must have been worship of objects of nature including the trees, and which also helps us to understand the origin of, and idea behind the tree-cult to a great extent comes close to the views of Frazer as reviewed above. It maintains that an attitude of awe, love or reverence towards objects of nature is born as a result of 'diseased' mind which invests lifeless things with life and all the powers that is associated with life. This error of mind is, according to this theory, born out of defective language viz., trees *bear* flower and fruits, thunder *sends* rain which further gives rise to some power inherent in tree, thunder etc. and consequently, a number of associated rituals (Mazumdar & Madan : 1961 : 156 ; Piddington 358).

Tree-cult may also be explained in the light of totemic plants and the practice of totemism by an overwhelming number of tribal people of different parts of the world. Totemism has been said to be a "mystical relationship between a human group and some class of natural phenomena usually a *plant* or animal species. Frequently in a primitive society, members of a particular lineage or clan consider them-

selves descendants of the totem and treat the *totemic plant* and animals ritually" (Service : 1958 : 457). Goldenweiser is of opinion that "totem and totemites may be supposed to share physical and psychological traits and the totem may be looked upon as a sort of guardian angel of the totemites". Tylor put forth that "the primitives believe that after a person's death, his soul takes abode in *certain plant*[1] or animal species and so the entire species is protected. Thus, totemism, according to Tylor's explanation emerges . . . . . as a form of religious worship, to be more precies, ancestor worship . . . . . " (Mazumdar and Madan : 1961 : 122-23). In India, a majority of the tribes may be found to be claiming such mystic ties with totemic objects including different species of plants.

Nature of Tree-Cult in Tribal India :

So far we examined the nature and distribution of the tree-cult in different parts of the world with different explanations given behind it. Now we shall see the nature of tree-cult as found among the tribes of India with our main focus on Bihar. The tree-cult in tribal culture can be understood on the level of different concepts, rituals or ceremonies associated with this cult as given below.

Sacred grove :

A number of Dravidian and Mundari speaking tribes of Bihar like the Oraon, the Munda, the Kharia, the Ho and the Santhal have a 'sacred-grove' consisting of generally *Sal* (Shorea robusta) trees located outside the village. It is one of the principal sacred centres of the village where some important tribal deities and spirits are believed to reside and which require periodical offerings and sacrifices for the peace and prosperity of the villagers. The sacred grove of the Oraon is known as 'Sarna' or 'Jaher' and is believed to be mainly inhabited by *Chala Pachcho* (Old Lady of the grove). She is the most popular of the Oraon deities and ranks as the head of all the village deities and spirits. She is represented by a block of stone at the foot of the main Sarna tree. The main festivals associated with the Sarna is *Sarhul* or *Khaddi* (spring festival) observed in the month of *Chait* (March-April) when *Sal* and other trees and plants are full of new and edible leaves. The ceremonies are performed and sacrifices of fowls are given under the main Sarna tree to *Chala Pachcho,* other Oraon deities and princi-

1 Italics are mine.

pal spirit, as well as to *Dharmes* (Supreme Being) by the village priest known as *Pahan* or *Baiga.* The main purpose behind the worship of the Sarna deities is to keep the village in general—its inhabitants, cattle, fields and crops from harm's way (Roy : 1915 : 108). A vigorous dance of men and women takes place at the *Akhara* on the occasion of Sarhul festival. "Rice-beer is freely drunk and ribald songs are sung. The licentiousness permitted on this occasion is believed to stimulate the fertility of the earth" (Roy : 1928 : 216). A similar belife may be found among the Santhals during their *Baha* festival. The Oraon maintain a taboo in cutting down any tree of the Sarna grove. By the way, here it would not be out of place to mention the views of Roy (1928 : 45) who said that "the Sauria Paharias or Malers of the Santhal Parganas who appear to be the nearest congeners of the Oraons, recongnise this spirit as one of their principal deities under the name of *Chal* or *Chal Nad,* to whom sacrifices are offered under a *Sal* tree just outside the *basti* or settlement as among the Oraons." However, Vidyarthi (1963 : 150) does not talk about such a *Sal* tree in connection with this deity.

The Munda also have such a Sarna grove located in the vicinity of the village and reputed to be a remnant of the primeval forest left intact for the local gods when the clearing was originally made. It is supposed to be inhabited by *Desauli,* the tutelary deity of the village, and his wife, *Jhar-Era* or *Maburu* who attend to the wants of their votaries. Every village has its own *Desauli* and his authority does not extend beyond the boundary of the village to which his grove belongs. "If a man of that village cultivates land in another village, he must pay his devotions to the *Desauli* of both". These grove deities are appeased and sacrifices are made to them by the village priest on behalf of the whole village and they are held responsible for the crops, and especially honoured at all the great agricultural festivals. They are also appealed to in sickness (Dalton : 1872 : 188).

One of the main deities of the Hill Kharias of Dhalbhum and Manbhum is *Baram* which is believed to reside in the sacred-grove known as *Baram-Sal* or *Thakurani-Sal* consisting of one or more stones, representing deities, ceremonially installed under some large tree or trees. *Baram* is supposed to be a spirit of their native forest and it is propitiated by *Dehuri,* the village-priest. This grove-spirit is given a libation of water by the village-priest during *Pardhi,* the Hunting festival held in the month of *Phalgun* (February-March) and blessings

are invoked to succeed in hunting expedition. Everybody joining the hunting expedition then touches his forehead with his weapon, makes reverent salutations to *Baram* and then all enter the jungle to hunt. During the second part of the Phagu festival, known as *Phagu Nawakhia,* again, the village-priest offers mango blossoms to the stone representing *Baram,* then sacrifices a goat or sheep, if any, in the name of *Baram.* During sacrifice, the priest prays for 'plenty to eat and drink in the settlement and immunity from sickness and other trouble'. *Baram* is also propitiated during other festivals and observances like *Jeth Nawa Khia, Dhan Naukhia* (Eating the first-fruits of Jhum cultivation), *Got Puja* (Pasturage sacrifice) and *Gohal Puja* (cattle-shed sacrifice).

The sacred-grove of the Dudh and Dhelki Kharias[2] is variously known as *Jankor, Jhankar,* or *Sarna* of the village. This sacred-grove is believed to be inhabited by the presiding spirits of the settlement like *Khunt, Baghia* etc. represented by sacred stones placed under a *Sal* or a *Murun* or *Mahua* (Bassia latifolia) tree. *Jankor* is associated with some important festivals of the Dudh and Dhelki Kharias like *Jankor Puja,*[3] held in the month of *Phalgun* (February-March) when *Kalo,* the village-priest besides burning incense, sacrifices fowls in the names of grove-spirits and prays to protect the bullocks, buffaloes, goats, men etc. in jungle and brushwood, from tigers and bears. Before sacrificing the fowls their feet are washed with water and they are made to pick up rice-grains from the heaps of rice placed before them. A worship is offered to the *Khunt-Pat* by the *Kalo* in the *Jankor,* also during Kadleta festival held in September-October when generally twelve fowls are sacrificed to the grove-spirit after giving the same treatment as in *Jankor Puja.* This festival is held at a time when the upland paddy is first harvested and the wet-paddy fields are green with transplanted paddy (Roy & Roy : 1937 : 310-358).

The Hos of Singhbhum use the word *Jahira* for their sacred-grove which is believed to be the shrine of *Jahira-buru. Jahira-buru* is a beneficient spirit and the consort of *Desauli.* She is believed to be an old spirit with matted white hair who is often seen on crutch. *Jahira-buru* is worshipped by the village-priest, *Deuri* along with her husband *Desauli* before the seeds are sown for the first rice-crop and again when the crops grow up and they show signs of ripening (Mazumdar : 1950 : 45, 212, 256).

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2 The Kharia tribe of Chotanagpur is divided into three sections : Hill Kharia, Dudh Kharia and Dhelki Kharia.

3 Jankor Puja is similar to the Oraon's Sarhul festival.

The Santhal worship centers round its most prominent sacred place of sacred-grove locally known as *Jaher* which is located usually to the west of the village. It consists of a number of tall, slim *sarjom* trees with one or two trees of other varieties. Two of the tallest trees standing side by side are thought to be the abodes of *Maran Buru,* the national spirit of the Santhal and of his female consort *Jaher Budhi,* i. e., the Old Lady of the Sacred-Grove. Besides them other trees are believed to be inhabited by "*Five and Six* (family of five brothers and one sister), *Gosae Era* (a female spirit) and *Pargana Bonga* (boundary spirit). Determination of the site of the grove is an important element in founding a new village and the choice of the site is made by the spirits themselves. These grove-spirits are propitiated by the village-priest during *Baha,* the Flower festival held in February-March, *Sohrai,* the Harvest festival held in October-Novermber, *Erok Sim,* the first agricultural festival held in June, *Iri Gundli Nawani,* the Millet festival held in August and *Janthar,* held in November. Women are kept away from participating in the sacred-grove. No woman can climb any of the trees in the sacred-grove nor may she be present when the sacrifices are made, nor can eat the flesh of any animal offered to the grove-spirits (Culshaw : 1949 : 80-89, Mukherjee 1962 : 233-42).

Sacred Tree :

Sometimes any individual tree also gets associated with a particular tribal deity or spirit either benevolent or malevolent in character and the people either propitiate and offer sacrifices to them or avoid them depending upon the nature of the deity or spirit concerned. Roy (1928 : 58) gives such an account from the Oraon by saying that in almost every village in the Chotanagpur plateau, there is some *Mui Chitkha* (Ficus religiosa) tree known by some such name as *Hajri Pipar* or, in some villages, as *Baranda pipar.* When the rains are late in coming, the women sweep clean the floors and yards of every house with cowdung, bathe themselves and take water in earthen jars and go, in the morning, in a body to the tree and pour water on its roots, and in some places the *Pahan* also burns incense. The Oraon believe that, after this, 'at least a few drops of rain are sure to fall that day, or at any rate, the rains will commence within two or three days'.

Mahadania is a terrible village-spirit believed by the Oraon. Formerly, this spirit used to be offered human sacrifices and until recently in years of famine or drought, human sacrifice was secretly offered.

Though according to Roy (1928 : 52), the spirit is ordinarily represented by a wooden peg with a thin iron rod stuck into it, in a few villages the present author has found its seat on a tree. At village Sanwaria,[4] it was believed to reside in a *Simber tree* (Bombax Malabaricum). It would be worthwhile to mention an incident connected with this shrine in the words of an informant. "Mahadania is a spirit of very angry nature. Once my brother-in-law was throwing stones on the *Mahadania Simber* (abode of the spirit). The father of Titru forbade him to do so but he did not take heed of it. When he returned to his village in the evening, he was taken seriously ill. The witch-doctor was consulted and he declared that the man was possessed by the *Mahadania* of Sanwaria. Later on, his parents had to come here near *Mahadania Simber* and sacrifice a fowl in the name of that spirit. Then only the man was recovered (Sahay : 1963 : 613).

The *Dessauli,* which is the most important and beneficient god of the Hos, coming next to *Sing Bonga,* the Supreme Creator, is generally believed to reside under a tree usually represented by a flat stone. The tree is tabooed to the Hos. No one may pluck leaves of the tree or cut its branches, fell it or plough the land under it. This deity is believed to protect the Hos from the ravages of diseases and epidemics and from those evil spirits which are foreign to them. *Dessauli* gives rain, averts hail and storms and is also the god of harvest. The *Deuri* offers a hen and a cock to this deity during the *Maghe* festival held in January and February and during the *Hero* festival which is held in June, every family may offer a fowl or subscribe to a he-goat to be sacrificed. When epidemics or diseases prevail in Kolhan, the *Deuri* offers a hen, a cock, a goat, a buffalo, and a pig as revealed to him in dream (Mazumdar : 1950 : 257).

Among the Dhelki and Dudh Kharias, *Reksha-dubo* (the protective spirit) who is believed to protect the village from mischievous spirits and move about with an axe in hand, has in many villages its seat on a large *Semar* tree and this spirit is reported to have been seen by some Kharias seated on a stone-slab perched as a throne on the branch of the tree (Roy & Roy : 1937 : 314).

Vidyarthi (1963 :152) also mentions about *Muri Gossaiyan* and *Mula Gossaiyan* (village deities) of the Maler who are believed to live on *Pushre* (Schleichera trijuga). Both these deities are worshipped on

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4 Village Sanwaria was studied in connection with my Doctoral Thesis on the Impact of Christianity on the Uraon of three villages in Chotanagpur, the field-work of which was completed as a result of a Pre-Doctoral Fellowship awarded to me by the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research Inc., New York, USA in 1959.

village level, the former on the fourth day of *Bandana* festival while the latter on the first day of *Bandana* in the evening. The former is given a sacrifice of pig while the latter of a goat. In addition to that, offerings of puffed maize and *Pitha* (cake) of maize are also made. While worshipping these Gossaiyan, the *Demano* (the village Shaman) performs his shaministic dance.

The Saoras also have some gods who dwell on trees but "when a Saora says", writes Verrier Elwin (1955 : 81), "a god is living on a tree with an unseen power ; what he means is that the god is perched on the tree as if he was a bird . . . ." *Kittung* is one of these gods who is a lover of trees. He sits down and weeps when he sees the devastation caused by the Saoras' axes, and goes to a great deal of trouble to find the seeds of new trees to grow instead. Other such gods of the Saoras are *Edangsum* (god of wood cut for fuel), *Karudsum* (a god born in black-plum tree among monkeys) and *Lambusum* (a god of the forest clearing). "Only in a few cases do the Saoras connect gods with trees in any permanent relationship. On the other hand, gods and ancestors visiting the earth often rest in or under trees, and the shades before their translation to the upper world can often find nowhere else to live." Though the Saoras do not show any particular respect for trees, it is taboo to cut the mango, mahua, tamarind and a few other fruit-bearing species. The taboo is believed to have taken its origin from the tears of *Kittung* who as said, is a great lover of trees. Elwin gives a detailed list of the trees with the rituals and beliefs associated with them as found among the Saoras. The trifoliate leaves of the *bel* tree (Aegle marmelos) are used in divination. A branch of the tree is placed by the central pillar of a house at the ceremonies during a funeral. The thorns are used by the shamans at name-giving ceremonies, and are placed above a door to keep away intrusive spirits. *Bassia latifolia* is a tree of great importance as it provides food, oil and ardent spirits ; it is a taboo to cut it. In some villages the tree is said to be the home of *Kinchesum*. Its leaves are used at the *Sikunda* ceremony. *Bombax malabaricum* i.e., the cotton tree is in some places said to be one of the favourite haunts of the *Buttamboi*, the female ghost who approaches young men in dreams and robs them of their virility. In a cholera epidemic the wood is used to make the little chariot in which *Maridisum* is escorted from the village. *Ficus bengalensis*, i.e., the banyan tree is considered as a very sacred tree. It is the *Sadru*-shrine of the gods. It is a taboo to cut it. If anybody does it out of ignorance, he must sacrifice a goat to the gods and *Kittung* living there. The Saoras make offerings to the banyan at the Harvest festivals. It is

considered as a 'mother'. Similarly, *Ficus religiosa* (pipal), *Mangifera indica* (mango), *Musa sapientum* (plantain), *Semecarpus anacardium, Shorea robusta, Tamarindus indica* and such other trees and plants have also some ritualistic value in the Saora culture (Elwin : 1955 : 205-209).

The Baigas of Madhya Pradesh also have tree-cult among them. Their principal deity is *Bura Deo* who is supposed to reside in a *Sal* tree. Goats, coconuts, fowls and Mahua spirit are offered to him (Kurup : 1962 : 137). The Kadar of Cochin, believe in *pisas, bhut, yakshini* and *gandharva* which are male and female spirits and are believed to live on trees. Tree-spirits do not seem to play a very important role in Kadar religious life. They do harm especially to children, but are not actually worshipped, addressed in prayers or represented in any form (Ehrenfels : 1952 : 156-57). The Andaman Islanders are also said to have possessed a number of jungle and tree-spirits known as *Ti-miku Lau* and *Erem Canga* and we find many magical and ceremonial values associated with either the branches or leaves of the trees like *Anadendron painculatum, Hibiscus tiliaceus, Ficus Laccifera, Pterocarpus dalbergioides, Tetranthera lancoefolia* etc. (Radcliffe-Brown : 1948 : 136, 180-83).

Totemism :

Totemism is a common feature in tribal India and a number of tribes believe in their mysterious relations with some plants, besides animal species. The Santhals have more than a hundred clans named after plants or animals or material objects. The Ho's *Killi* is an exogamous clan and they have often fifty of them. The Oraon, the Munda and the Kharia clans are likewise exogamous and totemistic. Out of a list of eighteen vegetable-totems among the Oraon (Roy : 1915 : 326-338), eight are tree totems named after the trees like *Bar, Basa, Kinda, Putri* etc. Roy says that the people do not believe in the descent of men from these totems. All that they indicate is that the totemic plant or animal is believed to have helped or protected the human ancestors of the clan or been of some peculiar service to him. The people generally show reverence for and do not destroy their totem-trees, or are refrained from eating their fruits or flowers. The Santhals also have some of their clans named after plants like *Aegle Marmalos* (Bel tree) and *Ficus bengalensis* (banyan tree) and they believe in some kind of relationship with them. Most of the Madhya Pradesh tribes also claim their mystic ties with plant species and the destruction of such a plant is tabooed for that totemic group. Some of the clans of the Bhils are

named after *Vaskula* or *bas* (bamboo), *Markam* (mango tree), *Tekam* (teak tree) and *Irpachi* (mahua tree) (Kurup : 1962 : 138).

Festivals Associated with Trees :[5]

Karam, or *Karma* is one of the most popular festivals of the tribals of Chotanagpur and Central India though it is said to have been borrowed by the Hindus (Roy : 1928 : 240, Culshaw : 1949 : 114). "Many of the songs contain references to Ram and Lakhan, heroes of Ramayan." As a matter of fact, this festival is named after the *Karam* tree (Nauclea parvifolia) which is associated with the God Krishna in *Vishnu Puran.* This festival is held sometime in July-August and is essentially a festival of women and particularly of maidens. In the morning the young bachelors of an Oraon village go out in a body, dancing, singing and playing music to cut down and bring home these branches of *Karam* tree for the *Karam* festival. The village priest or his assistant also may accompany with a little oil and vermilion to anoint the *Karam* branches. After the *Karam* branches have been selected and cut down, three young bachelors, linked hand in hand, carry the branches, one each, to the village. The other young men go on dancing and singing around them. The maidens with their *Karam*-baskets follow at a little distance singing and dancing. The spirit-possessed disciples of the witch-doctor who also accompany them, run about on all sides and in all directions. The three branches are brought to the *Akhra* (dancing platform) and planted in the middle of it in a cermonious way. These branches are addressed as *'King Karam'*. The men and women of the village spend their whole night dancing and singing at the *Akhra* round the *Karam* branches. Next morning, the *Karam Raja* is festooned with wreaths of flowers and armlets, bracelets and necklets of wild grass and then the story of the *Karam Raja* is narrated to the people there at the *Akhra* by the village-priest or any old man who knows it. After the *Karam* legend has been recited, the young men and women all make offerings of flowers from the *Karam* basket by throwing the petals at *Karam Raja.* In some places incense is also burnt and barley-shoots are offered to the *Karam* deity. The Oraons believe that by observing ceremonial fast at the *Karam* festival and joining in the *Puja* their women and maidens secure the well-being of their brothers in particular. The *Karam* branches, after the people have prostrated themselves before it, are carried by the

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5 Besides examining the tree-cult proper, this paper also covers the rituals and festivals associated with the twig, leaves or branches the trees.

women in a procession. They proceed first to the *Pahan's* house then to the *Mahto's* and *Pujar's* house. At each house, the mistress of the house anoints *Karam* branches with oil and vermilion and offers three pieces of bread. Finally, the branches are drowned in some stream or pond (Roy : 1928 : 240-46). A special *Karam* festival known as *Burhi Karam* is also celebrated in all villages once in three years as also in a year of drought in the month of July.

Among the Santhals, sometimes *Karam* festival is celebrated in connection with the appointment of a new headman of a village and sometimes in connection with death ceremonies of a man of substance. Sometimes it is associated with *Mak More,* an occasional sacrifice to the 'Five'. Whatever may be the occasion, the celebration of this festival is regarded as an insurance either on behalf of a particular family or on behalf of the whole village. It may be either a way of enhancing good fortune or of warding off evil (Culshaw : 1949 : 114).

Like *Karam, Jitia* festival is also said to have been borrowed by the Hindus. It is celebrated twelve days after the *Karam* festival. Formerly it appears, *Jitia* used to be celebrated only by individual families but now most of the villages join in the festival and every year select some individual villager in whose house the festival is to be celebrated for that year. It is usually observed by the women who have children and for the welfare of the latter. They observe a fast on the day preceding the festival. They take bath and place upon cucumber leaves at the door of each room in the house one or two pieces of bread, a cucumber (believed to represent a male child) together with some flowers of vegetables. In the evening of the day of festival, two or three *Jitia Pipar* branches are planted on the courtyard in front of the house of the *Pahan.* A *bel* (Aegle marmelos) fruit may also be placed over it. A Brahman priest is also called to officiate at the ceremony who recites some *mantras* or prayers. At night, a ball of silk thread is suspended from the *Jitia* branch and the Brahman recites the *Jitia* legend. The following morning the *Jitia Pipar* branch or branches together with the *bel* fruit are taken up by women and thrown on the road before they have taken any food (Roy : 1928 : 248-49).

Tree-Cult Associated with Life-Cycle :

When an Oraon woman is in a difficult labour pain, certain magical means are adopted to expedit the delivery. Roy. (1928 : 118) mentions about one such expedient in the case of a protracted delivery. "If there is in the neighbourhood a tamarind tree (Tamarindus Indica) which

was ever singed with lightning, a man goes to such a tree, stands against it and strips off a portion of its bark where it touches his waist. The man now goes with this bark to the door of the lying-in room which is forthwith closed against him, thrusts one end of the bark through a hole in the door, and remains standing there holding the other end of the bark with his hands. The woman has to fasten her gaze on this bark to facilitate delivery. As soon as delivery takes place, the man is informed about it and he takes out the bark, for, otherwise, it is believed, inversion of the uterus is sure to occur".

Sahay (1963 : 265) who worked among the Oraon, also notes a similar observance in case of a *Tetar* child. A male or female child born after its three sisters or three brothers respectively are known as *Tetar* (born after three) child and the non-christian Oraon attach special importance to it. It is believed that such a child brings *Garah* (misfortune) to its parents or its siblings. To neutralize the evil effect of such a child the midwife or the father of the new-born child should go to a neighbouring *Tetar* tree (Tamarindus Indica) and make three strokes upon it with some weapon. It is called as *Garah Katna* (neutralizing the misfortune).

Roy (1915 : 241-43) writes about an interesting ceremony of the Oraon in which they derive procreative vigour from *Sal* tree. Twice in a year, once about a week before the *Phagu* festival in March and again about a week before the *Sarhul* festival in April or May, the boys of youth dormitories are led forth by the Dhumkuria Mahto to a secluded place away from the village. The Mahto carries a new thin *Sal* stick and also a *Sal* sapling in which a slit has been made to resemble the female organ. The boys besmear one another all over the body with red ferruginous earth. The Mahto in the meantime plants the sapling firmly on the ground. The boys of the two upper grades now spit into the sapling. The boys of the lowest grade have now to strip themselves absolutely naked and each boy in turn has to insert his organ into the saliva-filled slit. All the time, the boy-Mahto stands behind the *Sal* sapling with the stick in his hand and as each boy is about to step back after performing the magic operation the Mahto strikes the boy on his thigh with his Sal stick. Thenceafter they go back to the village *Akhra*.

Among some Mundari and other tribes one finds a conspicuous rite of 'marrying with a tree' during the course of the actual marriage ceremony. Dalton (1872 : 194) talks about such a marriage among the Mundas when the bride and bridegroom after they have been anointed with termeric, are taken and wedded not to each other but to two trees,

the bride to a *mohua* (Bassia latifolia), the groom to a mango, or both to mangoes. They are made to touch the tree with vermilion and then to clasp it, and they are tied to it.

Sahay (1956 : 126) also found a similar wedding with the tree among the Malpaharia tribe of Santhal Parganas. The prospective groom is taken to a mango tree outside the settlement accompanied by the musicians and the village-priest, *Dehri.* Dehri carries a sword in his hand and moves round the tree five times with a raw thread in his hand while the groom holds the other end of the thread to the tree. After completing five circles, the Dehri makes a scratch in the tree with his sword, takes out a small piece of its skin and gives it to the groom to taste it. A similar ceremony is observed at bride's place, but instead of mango, she is married with a *mahua* tree.

Marriage of Fruit-trees :

Some of the tribes like the Oraon and the Kharia consider it essential to marry the trees, specially which yield edible fruits, before it bear the first fruit. As child born out of wedlock are despised and disdained, so, too, the fruits of trees that have not been ceremonially 'married' are abstained from being eaten by these people. It is believed that fruits of a tree which is not ceremonially "married" or sanctified are likely to breed worms. And hence until the "marriage" of the tree is solemnised, the owner or planter of the tree abstains from eating its fruit. Generally the "marriage" ceremony of a fruit-tree is now-a-days celebrated after it begins to bear fruit, and in most cases along with the marriage of a son or other member of the family of the owner of the tree. "The human bride and bridegroom are conducted in procession to the tree along with all the guests, male and female. The two take hold each of one end of a long unbleached cotton-thread and circumbulate the tree five or seven times, while the rest of the people dance". Roy & Roy remark that "the object of the ceremony would appear to be to induce into the tree the propitious 'mana' or power associated by the Kharia with the bridgroom and bride" (Roy & Roy : 1937 : 383-84).

Performance of Danda-Rengha with a Bhelwa twig :

The tribal people in general and the Oraon in particular believe that envy distils from the eye and mouth of the envious man, a kind of poison most fatal to crops and men. It is neutralized by the performance of *Danda Rengha* which is supposed to counteract the effects of the evil-

eye and evil-mouth. *Danda Rengha* which is also known as *Danda-Katta* and *Bhelwa phari,* is performed individually, generally during *Karam* festival and before threshing the *Buna* paddy in the barn. But according to one's devotion it may be performed as often as one wishes. It may be performed by the Pahan or any elderly person who knows it. After such a person is called to the house for the ceremony, a place is swept and besmeared with cow-dung. He takes his seat in the middle and draws a magical figure[6] with the help of red dust of the burnt mud of the hearth, white flour and powdered charcoal. In the centre of this figure, the officiating man puts a handful of rice on which he places an egg and a twig of *Bhelwa* tree (Semicarpus anacardium), one end of which is split up and a small piece of the wood fixed in it. Sitting then with his face towards the east, he draws two intersecting lines with diluted cow-dung and puts five small pieces of wood representing the *panch* or *panchayat* of the village in a winnowing-fan containing some rice. He then puts on the egg the twig of the *Bhelwa* and goes on singing the story of genesis (Dehon : 1905 : 121-181).

Averting Evil-eye with magical twigs :

Certain trees like *Bhelwa* (Semicarpus anacardium), *Kend* (Diospyros melanoxylon) and *Sinduar* (Vitex Negundox) are believed to have a magical potency and its saplings and branches are used by the tribals like the Oraon "to avert evil eye and repel evil spirits and other evil influence from the standing crops." On the day of *Kadlota* festival in August, young men of the village go to some jungle to cut down saplings and branches of the *Bhelwa,* the *Kend,* and failing that shrubs of the *Sinduar* and bring them to the village. On the following day the *Danda Katta* ceremony is performed in every Oraon house and pieces of the *Bhelwa* and *Kend* or *Sinduar* branches or twigs are planted in the various fields of each Oraon cultivator. A little of the sun-dried rice used in the *Danda Katta* ceremony is also tied up in *Bhelwa* leaves on these branches or twigs to avert the evil influence on the field (Roy : 1928 : 239-40).

Thus, the preceding account of the different tribal people gives us an idea of the various forms of tree-cult being practised in the tribal culture with their underlying beliefs. It also helps us in understanding the universal character of this cult, especially in the background of the discussion given in the first part of this paper.

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6 This figure has been illustrated in the book 'Oraon Religion and Customs' by S. C. Roy (The Industry Press, Calcutta, 1928) in the beginning of the book.

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PRIYARANJAN SEN

A BASALI FOLK-SONG

BASULI, a variation of the goddess Chandi and a variant of the form *Bisalakshmi,* is generally known and worshipped in countryside places in India. The Bengali poet, Chandidas, drew inspiration from her worship ; the poem *Krishna-kirtan* was composed to offer her *puja.* But it is not generally known that a peculiar goddess, called *Basali,* represented with a horse's head, and sometimes as a horse altogether made of wood, is worshipped extensively in Orissa by the Keots and allied tribes, and popularly known as *Ghoramuha Basali.* I wrote a paper on the subject in the Souvenier of the All India Folklore Conference, Calcutta. * A folk-song on *Basali* has reached my hands, thanks to Sj. Sudhar Pattanayak, a former Settlement Officer in Bihar and Orissa, who found it in course of his tours through the villages of Cuttack and copied it *verbatim.* It is in the form of a question and an answer,—traditional literary device. I have transcribed the Oriya song into Roman characters, and prepared an English translation.

Question

Shun shuna bhaire pracaria tote,
Katha-ghora goti tui anilu kemante,
Kemate prakara ghora holoka jata
Kahi debu bhai are ethi adi anta
Purbare kiey se thila taha mote kaha
Ashwaku ghenina bhai sehi thare raha
Sadaguru koti guna dei achi tote
Ghorara bicaraku ucara kahi debu mote
Moha bola kara bhai shabada ucara
Aswini Basoli maku koti namaskara
Eteka ucara kahi baseli carana
Kaibarta Dasa raja pashila sharana
Acyutananda ye eha gitare gaile
Shri Krushnacaranartale sharna pasile.

Translation

Hear, brother, O hear, I ask you : how did you bring a wooden horse ? In what manner was the wooden horse born ? Brother, do

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* All India Folklore Conference held at Calcutta from February 8 to 10, 1964.

please tell the beginning and the end in this. What was it in the beginning ? Tell me that. Remain there, O brother, taking the horse (with you). The blessed master has given you a large number of gifts : please do tell me the details on the subject of the horse. Keep my request, brother, utter forth ; millions of bows to mother Basoli in a mare's form. Saying this, the Dasa King, of Kaibarta caste, took refuge in the feet of Basoli, and Acyutananda, who sang this in a song, took refuge in the feet of Sri Krishna.

Answer

Shuna shuna bhaire shabadanka sara
Tu mote pacarilu ghouara ucara
Purva manu kalpare brahma loka swaye (?)
Cari sahasra yuga tahi gala bohi
Bramhara shayane cari yuga dhari ghote
Hasti shunda praye kala ghora brushti
Sthala kula budi jala akashe lagila
Chapanaye koti jeeva jantu jata kala
Kshiti apa teja bayu akasha gagana
Virata dehare yai sehi hela janma (?)
Se virata mandala ye mahakalpa vata
Tahi dhyana kale puni phitayi sankata
Ehi mati kete samvatsara tahin gala
Vatapatra gotiye jalare padila
Nirakara purusha taku nabakeli kaley
Nabakeli karante vata ye putara
Lahadira ghate puni kampila sharira
Kampamana hoi karna sthana ausile
Kirana vindu gotie jale pakayile
Se kirana vinduru ye purusha janmila
Pahanri uthina vataputaku dharila
Vata puta purva bhage prabhu dele cahin,
Vata shrunga dharina ye purushe achayi
Prabhu pacarile kahu ailu kisa tumbha nama
Se boile tumbha binu na-jayina ana,
Tumbhe mora mata pita vije vataputa
Tumbhanku chinhili muhi, kanhin nahin bheta
Shri Hari boile purve ambharibhiana
Kaibarta dasa raja he tora nama
Se bataku Mahaprabhu dhyana kale stuti
Patra ye gotiye khasi padile tauti

Se patraku Mahaprabhu kari karniyara
Dasa rajaku basaile tahara upara.
Ehimati kete sambatsara tahi gala
Bramhanishi payina ye aruna uinla
Jagrata hoina Bramha netrare dekhila
Karunya jala ye sehu sanguru schalila
Virata angaru se ye pavana ksharai
Chapana ye koti jeeva janhu jata hoi
Purve ye sansara khela hela seimata
Kaivarta dasa rajaku bujhaile tattwa
Ehi vata puta gheni sinhala dwipa yaa
Rajapana basina tahin puja paa.
Emanta tattwa bujhai rajanku kahile
Kiye se kulaku deva mane vicarile
Dahala pandala se ye padanara hai
Sapata patala se ye phuti dishuaye
Emanta bolina vataputaku cahile
Turanga gotiye jalu hulasi boile
Ajna paramane mai turanga hoila
Lakshaka yojana yaye prushtha bistarila
Rajanku ghenina prabhu ashwara prusthare
Ashwa cali dele se ye mana santoshare
Dahala pantala ashwa vikrami lasila
Dariakulare asi ubha ye hoila
Se ashwaku dasa raja simhala dwipa nela
Kete sambatsara taku vahana ye kala
Ehi ashwa gheni muhi karuachu nata
Sehi mora sadaguru muhi tara cata
Sadaguru kotiguna dei thil mote
Ghorara vicaraku ucara kahi dehi tote.
Acyutananda ye ehi geetare gaile
Sri Krishna carana tale sharana pasile.

Translation

Listen, brother, listen to the sum of words : you asked me about horses. In the *Kalpa* of the first Manu, in the Brahma world even, four thousands of *yugas* passed away in that. Calculating four *yugas* to Brahma's lying down, there was a heavy downpour as from the trunk of an elephant. The water flooded the land and the coast had reached

up to the sky, and produced 56 crores of animals. He was born who is great in size, who is earth, the waters, fire, air, space and the sky. In that great circle there is a *mahakalpa* banyan tree, where if one meditates, all trouble is cleared up. In this way many round years passed by there ; a banyan leaf fell down into the water. The formless sported with it in water, and while sporting, as the leaf was struck by the waves, tremor passed through the body. Trembling, the ear glistened, and a drop of *semane virile* was dropped into the water. The being that was born of that drop, dived and got up and took hold of the banyan leaf. The *Prabhu* cast a look at the leaf in its front part , there was a being sticking to the protruded leaf.

The Prabhu asked : whence dost thou come, what is thy name ? He said : "I do not know anything beside you. You are my mother and father, manifested in the banyan leaf. I have known you, but cannot meet you anywhere". Sri Hari said,—"Formerly thou went of our kneading ; let thy name be Dasa, king of the Kaivartas." The Mahaprabhu meditated over that banyan tree and praised it. He made an ear-ring of the leaf which dropped there and set thereon Dasa king. In this way many round years passed off ; the night of the Brahma world was over ; the bright dawn set in. Brahma woke up and saw with his eyes the sea of kindness which welled up from the connection, the breeze which sprang from the immense body and the 56 crores of animals which were born thereof. He explained to the Dasa king of Kaivarta caste how the sport of the world went on formerly : "Go to the island of Ceylon with this banyan leaf, and sitting there in royal fashion, receive worship there". Explaining the way in this fashion he spoke to the king and thought over in his mind from what race he was sprung. Being at the basis of human society, he penetrated very deep and exposed the seven *patal*s of basic strata. Saying this he glanced at the banyan leaf, and a horse shoved up from the water. The horse was born according to instructions and spread his back over a lakh *yojans* (40000 miles). The Prabhu, taking up the king on the back of the horse, spurred the horse, in the delighat of his heart. The horse, of a deep stock, pawed the ground in vigour and both the rider and the horse came to the side of the sea. The Dasa king took that horse to the island of Ceylon and used it for his conveyance many a year round. With this horse I am making a (stage representation) show ; this is my right preceptor and I am its servant. The right preceptor gave me a crore of qualities ; "do you speak out in detail facts about the horse". Acyutananda spoke out this in a song and took refuge in the feet of Sri Krishna.

P. C. DASGUPTA

A SAGA OF THE GREEN MANTLE

From time immemorial the plants and vegetations have been fascinating the human mind as the most beautiful and illusive green mantle of the earth. The trees that clad hills and dales and richly crowd or cushion the river banks or even sparsely stud an arid waste have ever enchanted the poets and thinkers who occasionally either searched an eternal beauty among them or mystified the subject. Apart from the utilitarian aspects of trees and plants affording various scopes in day to day life like the preparation of *Soma* by the Vedic Aryans or the use of *papyrus* for writing in ancient Egypt or the realisation of medical value of different herbs by early men, a feeling of undying beauty ever prevailed and perpetually blossomed with multicolours in the ancient realm of romance and imagination. In fact, trees or creepers with their flowers, leaves and tendrils could often represent the grace of a goddess or a nymph or immortalise an event, noble and unforgettable. While the earliest agriculturists realised that there was a mystery behind their annual crops, they also loved the landscapes embellished with plants. So, gradually the subjects of visual art among men through centuries were often replete with the beauty of vegetations bearing fruits or spraying blossoms. If art reflected human mind, such motifs expressed a genuine love and attachments to the Nature. Besides, the paintings of Egypt and Crete which describe flowers, creepers and other plants in a pleasant vocabulary or style vivid in details, mythology of various lands were inspired as ever by the beauty and romance of trees and flowers. Thus, developed the legend of the Garden of Hesperides among the archaic Greeks, and the Indian *Puranas* contain the belief in the garden of Paradise, the *Nandanakanana,* which promises an everlasting felicity. Further, the trees were slowly deified and they often became connected with a nymph or a youthful goddess. When a tree was presided over by a divine lady, the Greeks called her a Dryad and the Indians regarded her as a *Vriksaka, Yaksini* or *devata.* In this way the blooming youth of a divine lady was conceived as symolic of the enchanting beauty of a tree and, thus, gave rise to the inspiring cults of the *Salabhanjika* and *dohada.* While looking to some of the *Yaksinis* of Bharhut holding

Ragini Kakubha.
Rajasthani painting. probably Jaipur School. *Circa* 18th century A.D.
(The State Archaeological Gallery of West Bengal).

A Nayika wading in a forest solitude.
Rajasthani painting, probably Jaipur School. *Circa* 18th century A.D.
(The State Archaeological Galley of West Bengal)

Apollo pursuing Daphne who is being transformed into a tree.
Roman mosaic at new Paphos in Cyprus.

Vriksaka. Sanchi. *Circa* 1st century B. C.

Dream by Henri Rousseau (1844-1910)

Yakshini Ch andra.
Bharut railing. *Circa* 2nd century B. C.

Krishna emancipating Nala and Kubera by uprooting the twin *Arjuna* trees into which they were transformed. Stone. Paharpur. *Circa* 8th century A. D.

The worship of the tree god.
Mahenjo-daro seal.

The Assarian concept of the worship of the sacred tree by gods.
Carved stone slab from the Palace of Nimrod.

Radha-Krishna flanked by *Gopinis*.

Patachitra from Birbhum. *Circa* 19th century A. D.

(The State Archaeological Gallery of West Bengal)

branches of tree or the bewitching modulation of Sanchi *Vriksaka* one may also recall the ancient story of Apollo pursuing youthful Daphne who was transformed into a tree. The recently discovered mosaics at New Paphos in Cyprus include one depicting the theme which balances the passion and surprise of running Apollo with the quiet self-confidence of the most beautiful Daphne. In the same way Urvaṣi became a creeper (*ladabhavena parinadam se ruvam* before lamenting Pururava (for this reference contained in Kalidasa's *Vikramaurvasiyam* I am indebted to Sri S. C. Mukherji). The ancient Greeks believed in sacred trees in some way comparable with the sacred trees of ancient India as depicted on Punch-Marked coins or the plastic art and there are not infrequent references of tree-nymphs either benign or avengeful or performing an enchanting ballet beneath the boughs of a tree in moon-lit nights. Thus, Dryope was transformed into a blossoming tree for plucking a flower for her child and Erysichthon was severely punished for felling an Oak which was a favourite of dancing Dryads. Perhaps, the mysterious atmosphere of the forest was characteristically expressed by the legends of the Pan in Greek mythology. The horn-headed and goat-footed Pan plays the flute of reed in the forest and occasionally startles wanderers, hence the word *Panic* means fear and as he represents the Nature, *Pan* means universal. The flute of the god is also a transformation of the nymph Syrinx who escaped his passion.

In India the trees are ever divine perhaps since the forgotten epochs of the Bronze Age, and their cults are often symbolic and transcendental. While some of the steatite seals of Mohenjo-daro depict tree-gods either in the context of a forest or ritual, the painted pottery of chalcolithic India often visualise apparently sacred plants, creepers, trees, leaves, specially those of the holy *asvattha,* the *Ficus Religiosa.* Such elaborate delineation of plant-life expresses an aesthetic mood and taste for sylvan beauty and reveals a genuine love and respect for Nature. The flowers were even the symbols of beauty whose scents could obviously bring affection by wafting afar. The terracotta mother-goddesses of Mohenjo-daro and Harappa appear to have been adorned by fan-shaped headdresses which may be stylised variants of flowers. Like the idea of the cosmic tree contained in the Puranas the Assyrians also believed in a divine tree and carved the scene of its worship by gods on a stone slab of the palace of Nimrod. The romance and beauty of trees and flower-beds on the other hand have given to civilisation a special enchantment sometimes giving rise to idyllc events bordering on mythology like the memory of the Garden

of Eden or the reminiscences of the Hanging Garden of Babylon. While the Indians fondly contemplated the divine *Nandanakanana* in Indra's paradise, the ancient Indian kings so often built pleasure gardens of fantastic beauty referred to in the classical Sanskrit literature. Aelian greatly admired the palace of Chandragupta and told, "In the Indian royal palace where the greatest of all the kings of the country resides, besides much else which is calculated to excite admiration, and with which neither Susa nor Ekbatana can vie (for, methinks, only the well-known vanity of the Persians could prompt such a comparison), there are other wonders besides. In the parks tame peacocks are kept, and pheasants which have been domesticated, there are shady groves and pasture ground planted with trees, and branches of trees which the art of the woodsman has deftly interwoven ; while some trees are native to the soil, others are brought from other parts and with their beauty enhance the charm of the landscape etc". Apart from such Indian gardens of pre-Christian times the beauty and wonders of gardens or trees are often extolled in ancient Indian literature including the immortal works of Kalidasa. In one place of the *Raghuvamsa* (Canto VI) the princess Indumati is addressed by Sunanda in an eloquent language describing the tender flower-bed of Vrindaban as equally comparable with the floral wealth of the garden of Kubera, the Lord of the *Yaksas* who resided in Alakapuri. At another place of the classic the sensuous gestures (*Sringarachesta*) of kings for the beautiful princess have been described as a foliated tree on the eve of blossoming.

Apart from the rare beauty and ritualistic importance of flowers and foliages, blossoms, creepers and trees sometimes symbolise or commemorate an event in a poetic air, sensitive, tender. While the ancient classical mythology of Europe will relate how Phaethon, the son of Phaebus-Apollo fell down in flame on the river Eridanus and his weeping sisters turned into poplar trees sheding "tears of amber upon the water", another legend will describe how a mulberry tree witnessed the immortal love and tragic death of Pyramus and Thisbe of Babylon. In a same touching and sweet manner a Bengali legend contains the story of seven young brothers turned into *Champa* flowers.* In fact, there are many myths of this nature current among various nations of the world and they humanise flowers or birds. Among all these about flowers the story of Echo and Narcissus is hard to forget. The Egyptian story of Bata and his unfaithful wife of

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* *Satbhai Champa*, "Thakurmar Jhuli". Dakshinaranjan Mitra-Majunder.

much eariler origin also tells how the soul of the former resided in trees. On the other hand, the Puranic mythology relates the story of Nala and Kubera transformed into *Yamalarjuna* i.e., the twin *Arjuna* trees and their emancipation by Krishna. The subject has been beautifully expressed in one of the stone reliefs of *Paharpur* in Bengal appertaining to about 8th century A. D.

Indeed the trees and vegetation have been occupying a very prominent place in Indian art from most ancient times across the civilisation of Mohenjo-daro and other chalcolithic cultures of India. While the seals of the Indus Valley so often depict animals of lush vegetation, the painted pottery of Mohenjo-daro civilisation and other contemporary or succeeding cultures of India spontaneously bear motifs of plants and leaves. The recent excavations at Pandu Rajar Dhibi in the valley of the river Ajay in Burdwan district (West Bengal) have brought to light a kind of vases of black-and-red ware surprisingly looking like flower-pots which could adorn private houses. The elegant vases with flat base vaguely recall much later statements of Aelian regarding imported plants in an Indian palace garden. The veneration or love for trees may be seen even on Sunga and other contemporary monuments like Bharhut, Bodh Gaya, Sanchi, Bhaja and others. The soft and tranquil effects of the low reliefs of Bharhut are mainly the effect of trees, the still plant life unhindered by breeze yet sometimes vividly vibrant with running squirrels or climbing apes. Besides, the *Jataka* stories sculpturally translated at Bharhut have a dream-like appearance and they bear glimpses of Indian forests more than two thousand years ago with their massive trees festooned with creepers, the jungles occassionally traversed by hunters or a royal army and often presided over by youthful nymphs who wore heavy girdles around their delicate waists, had a streaming mass of hair coquettishly knotted or plaited and stood with a bewitching curve clasping a bough or embracing a tree. Whatever might be the metaphysical aspect of each concept very often a beautiful tree symbolised a youth nymph of eternal grace. The swaying lines of a female *devata* or *Yaksini* represented the shrine of life and regeneration and, thereby, were comparable with the sweet-scented masses of a blossoming tree. The flowers pleased the gods and beautified lovers. Even the ancient Indians sometimes believed in divine fruits resembling beautiful women (*Divyanariphalam*) which recalls the relief of a mysterious tree in the Bhaja cave (2nd century B.C.). From the scene of the *Chhadanta Jataka* occupying an architrave of Sanchi gateway down to the epochs of Rajput paintings the trees have offered the graceful surroundings of

a theme transcendental or romantic. The green vegetations and flowers have emphasised among others the emotion of a neglected heroine (*Khandita nayika*) or the longing of a Lady for her tryst on a bed of leaves in the wood (*Vasakasayyanayika*) besides ever symbolising the moods of the youthful heroine especially in the sequence of the *Ragamala,* the personified melody. Besides, Visnusharman searched for *niti* or morals mainly in the ancient folk-tales of the forest-life grouped in the *Panchatantra.* In Persia the gardens add a rich and lyrical beauty to the land. While, "the dome of the King's mosque in Isfahan glistens with flowery forms", in the language of the present Shahanshah of Iran "To Persians, inured to parched plains and barren mountains, the garden is synonymous with paradise." * In a word, the trees have inspired the sincerest inspirations of life and they have been emotionally associated with religion, morals, poetry and love. While a majastic tree can symbolise generosity and dignity, the delicate tendrils can symbolise the tenderest affection. The same feeling still stirs the minds of poets or painters or a scientist like Sir J. C. Bose who understood the subtle tremors of plant life. Shelley visualises the beauty of a forest in a star-lit night as he rhymes,

"Or when some star, of many a one
That climbs and wanders through steep night,
Has found the cleft through which alone
Beams fall from high those depths upon
Ere it is borne away, away,
By the swift Heavens that cannot stay,
It scatters drops of golden light,
Like line of rain that ne'ever unite ;
And the gloom divine is all around ;
And underneath is the mossy ground **

The same regard and search for a hidden beauty in a forest may also be felt among others in the paintings of Edouard Manet or Henri Rousseau. While Manet's *The Luncheon on the Grass* evokes the visible beauty of a forest and a woman in romantic eloquence and detached intimacy, Rousseau's *Dream* brings close the mystic relation between a recumbent Lady and a dense forest where animals lurked in a fantastic atmosphere.

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* *Life International*, July 29, 1963.
** Professor E. T. Champagnac : (*Prometheus Unbound*)
Hours with English Authors,

Some of the deeper ideas about woodland beauty are almost universal. While Vidar of the Teutonic mythology represented the eternal solitude and sombre dignity of the forests, the lovely Brunhild was cursed into a long sleep within a forest by Odin, the King of gods in the *Nibelungenlied* and came into existence in the realm of Greek mythology the stories of Artemis, the divine huntress vrguely recalling her Indian sister *Yaksini* Chulakoka of Bharhut railings. Above all these concepts pervaded the Indian concept of meditation in forest solitude for the emancipation of the *atman* from the fetters of rebirth. Thus, the worship of the *Bodhidruma* under which Gautama attained his Bhodi is a sacred factor in Buddhist ethics and religion. Likewise, Kwannin (Avalokitesvara) in Chinese art and the early Christian anchorites desired seclusion in solitary regions. Hokusai, the Japanse artist (1760-1849) produced his immortal print *The Fall of Yoro* in the same eternal mood, transcendental and spiritually satisfying.

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KUNJABIHARI SINGH

THE VESTIGES OF TREE-CULT AMONG THE MEITEIS

The religious history of the Meiteis of Manipur who accepted Vaishnavism as their religion since the beginning of the 18th century A.D. is filled with many an animistic practice chief among which is the cult of tree-spirit. This is quite natural for the religious faith of the Meiteis whose country is full of hills and forests. Tree-worship among the Meiteis may be classified into two stages : (i) pre-animistic, and (ii) animistic. The former refers to the worship of the tree itself "as a thing to be feared, having sentient existence and mysterious potency," while in the latter it is not the tree but its indwelling spirit that is worshipped.

Though active worship of the trees does not engage today the religious activities of the Meiteis who are now staunch Vaishnava Hindus, the traces of tree symbol worship and the propitiation of the indwelling tree-spirits are not completely lost among them. There still exist in some remote areas of Manipur a few communities who originally belonged to the Meitei community but do not form today a part of the proper Meitei community for their not accepting Vaishnavism. The Meiteis call such people as Loi meaning "the outcaste". Among the Loi people, though some signs of their assimilating Meitei Vaishnavism are discernible, tree symbol worship is found to have been actively done. The most sacred tree of the Loi or the ancient Meiteis is *tairen* (cedrela toona). It is so far not known how this tree began to receive reverence from the people. All Loi people, irrespective of their clans, worship this tree by bowing down before it. Sometimes offerings consisting of fruits, flowers, etc. are made to this tree. The Loi have not so far developed any animistic stage where *tairen* is regarded as the abode of an indwelling spirit. Though the Meitei medicine-men and medicine-women wield the branch of this tree even to this day in dispelling the evil spirit from a"possessed" individual, this does not explain the whole thing. In the present Meitei society, the sanctity of *tairen* is almost forgotten, and this tree grows like any other tree, unrevered and neglected.

Another tree which had not attained the status of *tairen* but which is still regarded as possessing some amount of sacredness is the pipal

tree, locally known as *sana-khongnang*. Now-a-days, pipal tree is also not worshipped by the Meiteis apart from venerating it. We do not find in the ancient Meitei chronicles any reference to the pipal tree as an object of worship, and it appears to us that the sanctity of pipal tree is a post-Hindu product among the Meiteis. It is evident that in course of time the significance of pipal as a sacred tree began to dwindle.

Along with the spread of Krishnaism came many lores woven around the life of Krishna, and among these lores was the lore of goddess Brinda Devi who is associated with *tulsi* plant. In every Meitei family a *tulsi* is planted generally on a small earthen mound in the middle of the courtyard. Sometimes, it is planted in a brick receptacle. Of all the vegetations, *tulsi* is the most sacred one among the Meiteis, and every day after taking bath, the Meiteis offer prayer to *tulsi* whose name is now synonymous with Brinda Devi. No offering to a Hindu deity is complete if a few leaves of *tulsi* have not been included in it. The antiquity of *tulsi* as a sacred object of offering among the Meiteis dates back since the pre-Hindu period. In the *Khunthok Leisemlon* which is one of the rare ancient manuscripts of the Meiteis, we find a long narrative about *tulsi*. To describe this briefly, in the 15th century A. D. when Kyamba was king of Manipur, the king of Pong (a kingdom in Upper Burma), presented to him many presents including a "salagram" of Vishnu. During this period, for the first time in Manipur, a few Brahmins came, and to them Kyamba gave away this emblem of Vishnu to be consecrated and worshipped These Brahmins prepared *kheer* to be offered to Vishnu and for that some leaves of *tulsi* were required. The Meiteis were ignorant of what a *tulsi* was, and they gave some leaves of *uhal-urang* which were indispensable among the Meiteis while offering oblations to their deities. This *uhal-urang* turned out to be exactly *tulsi* plant. Almost in every Meitei family, we find the base of *tulsi* is properly cleaned with water every day at the approach of twilight and there burning incense and lamp are put. But the special worship of *tulsi* falls in the month of Mera i.e., Kartik (October-November), and for thirty days of this month a long bamboo pole is posted near the *tulsi*, and a rope-device is so made that burning lamp is drawn high on top of the bamboo and is allowed to remain there for every night. Sweets, fruits, and flowers are offered at the foot of *tulsi* plant and members of the family pay obeisance to it.

We now come to the most significant part of tree-worship among the Meiteis. It concerns their *Umang-lai*. Literally meaning "the deity of the woods", there are over 350 *Umang-lais* in Manipur whose abodes are scattered throughout the Meitei country. A Meitei legend

has it that many aeons ago, gods and goddesses lived amicably with human beings, but with the increase of human vices and lies, gods and goddesses left human company and began to live in forests. This legend shows that the Meiteis have made a great advance in their religious thought because a tree is no longer the body of the tree-spirit but simply a temporary abode. Thus, in the words of Frazer, "animism is passing into polytheism", that is, the tree-spirit "enjoys a certain right of possession or lordship over the trees, and ceasing to be a tree-soul, becomes a forest-god."

It will not be possibie to give accounts of all the *Umang-lais*. Even after the wake of the powerful appeal of Vaishnavism, these *Umang-lais* have still been receiving, once a year, invocation and worship from the Hindu Meities in the form of a dance festival called *Lai-Haraoba* or "the pleasing of the deity". The *Lai-Haraoba* festival which symbolises the cosmological concept of the ancient Meiteis is pregnant with a *Weltanschauung*, their view of the universe. Of such a *Lai-Haraoba* festival given in honour of *Umang-lai,* Thangjing is the biggest considering the magnitude of the festivities and people's response to them. Thangjng and two other *Umang-lais* viz· Koubru and Wangbrel, all of whom are known as "the protector of the country-side", are still revered as arbiters of rain ; while Okmarel, another *Umang-lai,* is worshipped as a god of fertility. During the post-Hindu period, some of the *Umang-lais* are found to have been identified with Siva and Durga ; and sometimes the phallic or anthropomorphic symbol of Siva has replaced the amorphous existence of such an *Umang-lai.* Herein lies the beginning of a significant departure from the general principle of tree-cult. Although the presence of Saivism speaks only of the polytheistic attitude of the people, the atmosphere is indicative of how the active cult of tree-spirit gradually lost its hold upon the Meiteis, who, on their part, have now turned more and more towards Vaishnavism.

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I. M. L. Bhatnagar

TREE-SYMBOL WORSHIP IN PUNJAB

From the dim ages of the past some sanctity seems to have been associated with trees throughout the country and tree-worship has been a regular feature of Indian folk life. Tree-worship is on the wane among the highly educated circles. It was natural with the advant of Western education. But still trees are looked upon with reverence and estimation especially in rural area both by literates and illiterates.

Apart from the sanctity attached to trees, man is a wanderer from birth and is restless and rootless. Trees, therefore, offer him the solace of permanency, of something that seems durable. It is no small wonder that when a tree is cut down we feel the hurt ourselves and are reminded of death. Trees help us to foster a belief in mortality. The spirits of the departed are said to inhabit them and that is why in many ancient cultures they have been worshipped. Apart from this religious halo, it is a pleasant travelling among the trees.

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree

There are scores of trees and plants that are associated with tree-worship, but the *peepal* and the *tulsi* have their special significance and have been ascribed certain medicinal properties. The *tulsi* plant which has a major place in Indian homes has long been known for its medicinal value. Only recently a New Delhi Institute has discovered the effectiveness of its oily substance against Tubercle bacilli. Reference books are full of references to this plant and mystical properties were ascribed to it even in ancient Italy and Greece. The plant was particularly prized in Greece, the herb which was said to have grown on Chirst's grave was considered sacred. On Saint Basil's Day men go to Church with sticks of this plant. When they returned home, they spread some leaves on the floor to bring luck in the coming year.

Interesting descriptions of tree-worship in various districts of Punjab are found in the old District Gazetteers written by the British Administrators during the first decade of the twentieth century. This still holds good particularly in the rural areas.

In Ferozpore District the *peepal* and the *bor* trees are held sacred ;

there are also several sacred groves, which have been scrupulously preserved as waste and from which no one may cut any wood ; such are the grove at Nathpura, the patch of *dhak* jungle at Dhudike and the waste dedicated to Bhai Bunder at Bunder. The *jand* tree also plays an important part in various ceremonies connected with marriage, especially among the Bagris ; its twigs or those of the *dhak* are used by the Hindu tribes for the sacred fire in the marriage ceremony. There are also some well-known *jand* trees which are practically wayside shrines ; the best known is probably the tree supposed to have been planted at Serai Nanga by Guru Nanak. The *beri* also appears in the Bagri wedding ceremonies, while the leaves of the *nim* are strung up with potsherds over the entrance to the village to drive away cattle diseases.

In Ludhiana District the ceremonies observed on the birth of a child by the Hindu portion of the agricultural population had an element of totemism in it in their performance. When the midwife was called in, she tied a branch of the *siris* tree and an iron ring over the door to notify the birth and also to keep away the evil spirits. This is still observed by the orthodox peasantry. Sacred groves are to be found in some villages. The superstition about them generally is that they mark the spot where a holy man has become a *Sidh* and no one of the villagers would even dare to cut a twig of the wood. Fakirs and holy men are allowed to take what they want for their own use, but the people believe that the *Sidh* resides in the grave and it would be a sacrilege to cut any tree. The orthodox also believe in *Deo* who haunts old wells and *peepal* trees. Many weird stories are told of him. In Ambala District when a child was born the room in which confinement took place was marked among Hindus by the hanging of the net of ropes in which a *nim* or mango twig was suspended. When a Hindu was about to die he was taken off the bed, laid on the ground with his feet to the east, the ground was plastered and strewn with the sacred *kusha* grass and *sesamum* and pieces of wood of *beri, dhak,* or other wood except *kikar* were used to burn the dead body.

The people in the hilly areas of Punjab have long been custom-ridden and being highly religious in character. The Kulu Valley is still known as the Valley of Gods. The number of gods in Kangra and Kulu Valleys is legion. A very interesting account of tree-worship given in the District Gazetteer of Kangra 1924-25, Volume VII, Part A, is reproduced below :

"At every marriage twigs from five trees are cut and brought by a gardener (*Mali*) and put into a *kalas* (large earthen pitcher).

Among these plants are *ak* (calotropis procera), *dhak* (butea frondosa) and *am* (mango). This ceremony is called *panch-pallab,* or *kalas-ki-puja,* and consists in placing the twigs under a cocoanut and covering them over with a red or yellow cloth, both in the bride's and bridegroom's house, and worshipping them.

"The familiar tree-marriages of men who have lost two wives is made is Kangra with the *dhrek* or *bakain* (mela abedarachta).

"People who are childless regularly marry the *tulsi* (ocymum sanctum) to Rama, Vishnu, Krishna, etc., in the hope of having a child. If the birth of a child does not follow, then they much dread that a Yamdut, a messenger from Yama, or evil angel, will harass them on their road after death."—R. C. Temple.

There are very few trees naturally grown in the Lahaul and Spiti valleys, except for some juniper and *Burjh-patra* (Birch), and in the upper reaches of the valley of Spiti the whole country is almost barren. The people in Lahaul have grown in the course of last few decades willow and poplar trees along the villages. It is really a treat to see the way they grow them. As much care is taken of every individual plant as is taken for the domestic animal. The people water them in the summer and protect them against the grazing animals by all possible methods and also protect the trees against the rigours of the winter. Imagine the trunks of trees, at least for the first few years of their growth, wrapped with used cloth, rags, twigs, etc., very carefully.

The people of Lahaul and Spiti mostly follow Lamastic Buddhism. There are monks belonging to main sects—red hat and the yellow hat. In their practices they follow the religious rituals practised by the monks and the nuns of hitherto abandoned 'tantric' ways. Besides, these religious faiths of Buddhism and Hinduism, most people in Lahaul and Spiti irrespective of their faith also pay tributes to certain benevolent and malevolent local Gods (*Devtas*). In some places peoples pay tributes to *Devtas* named after the mountain peaks (for example Chuipin and Sisn in Lahaul Valley), old trees, etc. On the ways and cross-roads used cloths with *mantras* written on these, flutter in the wind hanging down from branches of trees wishing travellers bon journey. The people in Hariana region in Punjab (Gurgaon, Rohtak, Karnal, Mahendragarh) are rural in character. Throughout this area *peepal* tree and *tulsi* plant command great respect. In Hissar District it is a custom that *Naaee* hangs a branch of *nim* over the door of the deceased's house and visitors take a leaf and chew it. Another custom fairly in practice is that of placing Ganga water and *tulsi* leaves in the deceased's mouth. Among Jats and some other tribes of Gurgaon when

a boy is born, the daughters and sisters of the family decorate the walls with fuel cakes in each of which seven stalks of thatching grass are fixed. When the boy is taken to the threshold of the girl's house at the marriage ceremony he dismounts and strikes a *toran* (a small wooden frame suspended over the door with branch of a tree, *nim* and *peepal* preferred). In olden times, a widely known method of protecting the cattle was to erect at the entrance of the village two poles within which a rope of *dab* grass was stretched. On this suspended wooden models of a plough and a narrow mez, an earthen pot cover and an onion and an iron spike. All these were smeared with oil, red lead and on earthen cover was written a charm by some holy man. Then on an appointed day all the cattle were driven below the rope and charmed and on that day no fire was lit in the village until the evening and all the milk was given to the Brahmins. *Dab* or *munj* grass also figured in various death ceremonies. The funeral party placed logs of *peepal, jand, farash* or *kikar* wood and fuel cakes on and around the pyre, the pyre was set fire to with the torch of *pula* grass on the third day of the death and an earthen vessel with a hole which was stuffed with *dab* grass was tied to a *peepal* tree and the chief mourner filled it with water morning and evening for nine days. The water was allowed to drip to the ground, the idea being that it eased the deceased. The Karnal District Gazetteer, 1918, mentions that if a man not content with two wives wished to marry again he would first marry a tree so that the new wife may be the fourth and not the third, because numbers 3 and 13 were considered unlucky.

P. Thankappan Nair

TREE-SYMBOL WORSHIP AMONG THE NAIRS OF KERALA

Introduction

Tree symbol worship among the Nairs of Kerala is as old the as community itself. The Nairs who formed the militia of Kerala were once the lords of the country. Little attention has been paid to the religious practices of the people by social anthropologists and travellers. Animistic traits in the religion of the community still survive. We shall confine our attention to tree-symbol worship in this article. Worship of the ancestors and of sylvan deities also form an integral part of the religious life of the community.

Trees are primarily worshipped by Nairs as they are symbolised by certain gods and goddesses. Some of the plants and trees are sacred to particular gods and goddesses and by worshipping them, a Nair is indirectly worshipping those gods and goddesses. The worship of tree-spirits is not considered here, though it does prevail. Many a sylvan deity is worshipped all over Kerala, but a stray reference to Sasta, the Lord Aiyappan of Sabarimala, cannot be omitted. We shall begin with the plants and trees that a Nair worships at home.

1. Household plants and trees :

Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*). Every Nair Tarwad has a holy basil tendered and nursed with utmost care in its *Tulsithara* (the raised masonry platform). A devout Nair will take circumambulation for seven times of the *Tulsithara* after his morning bath. A few drops of the water that has been poured over a bough of the plant is drunk for expiation of all his sins. An educated Nair, who recently retired as a Headmaster of a secondary school, told me on asking why he is going around the *Tulsithara* every day : "You, youngsters have become too materialistic. The holy basil is sacred to Lord Siva, the God of gods. If you worship Tulsi everyday you need not go elsewhere to worship Lord Siva. By drinking the water in which a few leaves of the Tulsi have been soaked, you can cure yourself of all kinds of diseases." I

confess that a Nair household without a *Tulsithara* or a few Tulsi plants is an anachronism. Ladies do not wear garlands made of the Tulsi flowers and leaves, but a small twig of it can be found on the right ear of a Nair gentleman coming after his morning bath in the temple tank which he receives as *Prasadam* from the temple. Even if he does not go to the local temple for worship in the early morning, he shall have a few leaves of this plant put on his right ear, after his morning bath. There are voluminous legends which have gained currency in Kerala concerning this plant, but we are constrained to leave them aside for the sake of brevity. Growing of the holy basil within the compound of a Nair Tarwad is believed to be efficacious to keep away snakes and other venomous reptiles.

Jasmine, Mokkootty, Atakkamaniyan and other flowers :

A garland made from the fragrant Arabian Jasmine flowers is worn on the hair-knot of the Nair ladies. The flower is not offered in worship to any gods and goddesses, but it is considered as a symbol of chastity, purity and conjugal fidelity. The *Mokkootty* (*Coesalpinia Mimosoiches*) flowers were pinned to the long tresses of Nair ladies. It is an essential item in the offer of *Dashapushpam* (Ten flowers) in the month of *Karkataka* (July-August). The *Atakkamaniyan* shrub (*Sphaeoranthus Indi*) plays an important part in the festivities of Nair ladies. Its flowers and leaves are worshipped during the *Tiruvathira* festival in the month of *Dhanu* (December-January). During this night-long dancing festival in a circular motion, the ladies go to fetch this flower from their dancing floor to far-off fields with lighted lamp, the spout-vessel etc. The purpose of wearing this flower at mid-night *Pathirapoochoodal* ceremony during the Thiruvathira festivities is to prolong the life of the husbands of the married ladies. Virgins adorn their heads with this flower to get their chosen husbands. The *Kaitha* (*Pandanus odoratissimus*) flowers, though adorn the coiffure of Nair ladies, is not offered to any god or goddess as it has incurred the displeasure of Lord Siva. The flowers of *Ezhilapala* (*Echites Scholaris*) or the seven-leaved milk plant are offered as *Para* to many a goddess. The *Ashoka* (*Saroca Indica*) tree is reputed to be flowering, if a virgin kicks it. Its flowers are also useful for worship in temples.

Koovala :

Next to holy basil, *Koovala* (Bilva—Bel tree—*Aegle Marmelos*) plays an important part in the life of the community. A *Koovala*

with some creepers of the Arabian Jasmine twining on it is an indispensable item in a Nair Tarwad. The leaves of this tree are sacred to Lord Siva. Its trifoliate leaf signifies the three functions of Lord Siva—the Creation, the Preservation and the Destruction, besides His three eyes. The tree is preserved within a raised platform, if possible, and a small lamp lighted in a niche of the platform with cotton wicks immersed in it to face the east is a familiar sight in Nair households. The tree is seldom approached by ladies in their menstrual periods. A decayed or fallen tree is never used as firewood. Its fruits, though eaten in other parts of India, are never eaten in Kerala, as the fruit is considered to be the head of Lord Siva.

Kanikonna :

Kanikonna (East Indian kino tree—*Vengai*) with its golden, sparkling yellow flowers is worshipped on the occasion of the Vishu (Bihu) festival in the month of *Metam* (April-May). It forms one of the essential elements of the seven sacred objects that are used for the *Kani* (auspicious sight) which is taken from house to house on this occasion. The wearing of this flower shows that a girl is recently married. The flowering season of this tree is an auspicious period for marriages. Lord Muruga, son of Lord Siva, is the patron deity of this tree.

Tamarind :

The *Puli* (*Tamarindus indica*), though a useful tree for its pod filled with the pleasant, acidulous, sweet, reddish-black pulp as an ingredient in seasoning vegetable dishes is not worshipped ; but wanton destruction of it is considered to be a sin. Elfins, fairies and other evil spirits take the tree as their abode when it attains a height above 50 feet. A full-grown tree is rarely severed from the earth and the evil spirits can peacefully tenant it. The branches of a Tamarind tree are considered to be the abode of many female ethereal goddesses, whereas its trunk and lower stem are reserved for malicious spirits. If a Tamarind tree shows some abnormal biological phenomenon such as non-flowering and non-fructifying, then it will certainly be a sacred tree to the people of the locality, if not the whole of the people. If a tamarind tree proves to be barren, its trunk is cut in several places by a lady with a *dao* so that it may fructify !

Cocoanut :

This palm is found all over India. Our treatment of tree is confined to the beliefs entertained by the Nairs. The tree has given the name 'Kerala' to the land. This is the most useful tree ever found in the world, as from its leaves to roots nothing goes waste. The nuts which provide a refreshing drink in its tender stage is more useful when it becomes ripe for its kernel which in turn supplies the essential oil for cooking and bathing to the community. The tree is called by various names such as *Kalpataru,* but its Malayalam name is *Tengu.* About its origin, many a legend can be cited, but the one given by Dr. Francis Day in his *Land of Perumal* (p. 536) is interesting :

"Hindu tradition inform us that Kusi Rajah, being a strenuous worshipper of one Supreme God and rejecting the custom of offerings to inferior divinities became in course of time, almost equal to the gods, and made many of the grains in common use. As his power increased so did his ambition, and he meditated creating another species of human being very superior to anything existing in the world. But after he had completed its head, the demi-gods became alarmed and prevailed on him to cease his work. The head was therefore transformed into a cocoanut tree, which was henceforth to be one of the most useful of all trees in the vegetable kingdom ; and was associated to Ganesha, the protector of Sciences and learned men."

Cocoanut tree is worshipped by all the inhabitants of Kerala. Such a utilitarian tree deserves reverence. A Nair lady in her menstrual periods will never go near a cocoanut tree. Her very shadow is sufficient to make it barren for the rest of its life. Clothes worn by them will never be allowed to touch it. Nairs seldom pass urine near the tree, though others do so.

When kings are at enmity with one another and kill each other's soldiers, they nevertheless sometimes make peace. But if one king cut down any of the cocoanut trees belonging to another, peace will never be granted in all eternity. The wanton destruction of this tree is a sin and instant death is supposed to be the result of such cruelty. There is no limit to the number of cocoanuts that are smashed everyday in the temples of Kerala to propitiate Ganesha, the elephant-god, as no other offer can please the god. During my school days my mother used to advise me to smash a cocoanut in the local temple to invoke the aid of Ganesha. Even a dead tree is seldom removed.

Mango :

The *Mavu* (*Mangifera indica*) is not worshipped in any household, but it is never destroyed. The only wood, prescribed by the custom, for cremating a Nair is the firewood of the native mango tree. The aphorism *Navin-palakayil-vaiykuka* (to lay on a plank of mango tree to cremate) is uttered as a curse. As the tree is useful for its delicious fruits and firewood, every Nair Tarward grows a few trees.

Jack tree :

The *chakka,* fruit of a *Pilavu,* has become Jack at the hands of Europeans. The tree, though of utmost utility, is not devoid of any religious significance. The wood of this tree is used by the Kerala Christians for making the images of their gods. To a Nair it is a tree of his religion. The charred bones that have been gathered after cremation are kept in a fresh clay-pot and buried under a jack tree before it finds its onward journey to a sacred river. No other tree can be depended upon for giving the *Pithru* (departed spirit) the nourishment required for its onward journey to its destined abode.

A gaint jack tree in Travancore, called *Ammachi Pilavu,* which bestowed asylum to the *Ettuvettil Pillamar,* the warriors of the eight household, has been declared as a national monument by the Government of Kerala. Some jack trees near famous temples have become objects of worship.

Kanjiram :

Kanjiram, the nux vomica (*Strychnos nux vomica*) tree is indeed the jail for imprisoning all the demons. The tree is sometimes found clinched with too many nails. The malicious spirit or demon who dares to attack a Nair is exorcised and the exorciser clinches the demon to a *Kanjiram.* With every driving of the nail, the demon will declare that he shall never attack anyone else. But nailing him to a *Kanjiram* is a sure way to put him into rigorous imprisonment for his life. *Kanjiram* is not tenanted by gods of superior or inferior order. To walk with a *Kanjiram* stick at night will ward off a Nair from the attack of any devil.

Pala :

The *Pala* (*Neirum antidygentiarum*) tree is notorious for its association with goblins, eflins, fairies and all other conceivable malici-

ous spirits. To walk under the shade of a *Pala* at night is sure to invite the death of the person who takes the risk. After dusk-fall you may get a mud slinging from demons tenanting this dreaded, but very useful, plywood tree. Snakes seldom leave it as the tree is milky. A cobra which has bitten a person goes up immediately to a bough of a *Pala* and hangs its head down till the man is dead. The stinking smell of the tree is interpreted as due to the malicious influence of the elfins inhabiting it. None will dare to sever it. Ten years ago, a relative of mine, who sold a *Pala* tree standing in the compound had to face a lot of trouble. No local wood-cutter dared to touch the tree. Hence the buyer had to bring his own band of Christian wood-cutters from another place to sever the tree. After the severence of the tree, the inhabitants of the locality felt relieved of the malign influence of the deities tenanting the tree. No one will allow a *Pala* to grow in the household compound, though it is one of the best quality plywoods. Wild and fantastic stories are current about the *Pala* trees. Some people say that they have seen beautiful ladies sitting on the most fragile branch of this tree at night times. An illiterate villager may be describing to you the story of how he was taken to a *Pala* branch and what the elfin did afterwards to him. These are all wild stories without any substance.

The trunk of the *Pala* tree standing inside the eastern compound of the temple at Chottanikkara is full of nails. Spirits are imprisoned in this *Pala* and the most malicious one can never think of escaping due to the supremacy of the presiding deity—Chottanikkara Bhagavati. With every clinching of the nail, the demon declares that he shall vacate the human body. When I visited this temple in 1961 I got an opportunity to see how anyone who is possessed by a malicious spirit becomes dispossessed. During the offer of Kurusi (lime and turmeric dissolved in water) to the goddess, those who are 'possessed' instantly begin to tremble violently. It is easy to imprison the spirit at this juncture. Here there is no need of an exorciser.

2. Trees and plants in and around temples :

The most familiar sight of a village, town or city of Kerala is its presence of a temple. Some of the place names are derivations of the temples. Trichur is a corruption of *'Tri Siva Perur'* (place of Lord Siva). Every temple has an *althara,* a raised masonry platform for the *Pipal* tree. *Pipal* being the most important and sacred tree in a public place, its religious association cannot be overlooked.

The eminence of every temple in Kerala is judged by the height

of its *Al* (*Ficus religiosa*). These mighty trees, overlooking the adjoining paddy fields of a temple, is the home for many a bird. The cool, pleasant *Althara* served many a purpose in olden times. Customary justice was meted out here. The rulers were selected here. No Nair dared to tell a lie under this tree. This is the tree of knowledge. Gautama attained Englightenment under it. Lord Siva, sitting under its cool shade, facing the east, becomes Dakshinamurti. In one of the Indus valley seals, Lord Siva is represented with the Banyan tree. Lord Siva is the patron and presiding deity of this tree. The tree never dies and as such it is likened to the Universe. Lord Krishna says in the *Geeta* (Ch. XV—verses 1-4) the following words.

> "They speak of an eternal Ashvattha rooted above and branching below whose leaves are the Vedas ; he who knows it, is a Veda-knower.
> "Below and above spread its branches, nourished by the Gunas ; sense-objects are its buds ; and below in the world of man stretch forth the roots, originating action.
> "Its form is not here preceived as such, neither its end, nor its origin, nor its existence. Having cut asunder this firm-rooted Ashvattha with the strong axe of non-attachment,—then the Goal is to be sought for, going whither they (the wise) do not return again. I seek refuge in that Primeval Purusha whence streamed forth the Eternal Activity". (Swami Swarupananda's translation).

When an old *Pipal* dies a natural death, which seldom happens, or its branches wither away, it is never used for the purpose of fire-wood. Many a banyan tree is working wonders all over Kerala. The whole of Kerala was taken by storm by the reported appearance of an image of Lord Krishna on a leaf of a great *Al* in Trichur sometime towards the end of 1964. People flocked to see the image, but only the true devotees could see it ! Lord Krishna is pictured as a babe on a *Pipal* leaf. The image of Lord Krishna modelled on a *Pipal* leaf is kept in many a Nair house. Lord Krishna is believed to have stolen the clothes of maidens and taken his seat on a branch of this tree while they were bathing.

The banyan tree standing in front of the temples are either tenanted by Lord Krishna or Lord Siva. But the trees standing in public places such as cross-roads and junctions, are tenanted by lesser divinities such as Yakshas, Kinnaras, Gandharvas etc. The gentle rustiling of *Pipal* leaves is considered to be produced by these deities and

not by wind. It is a matter of pleasure to note that this tree does not exert any malign influence on the mankind.

Pipal, Mango and Margosa (*neem*) form the trivirs in front of a temple. They are planted together and a masonry platform raised for them. But, in due course, Mango and Margosa, after giving shade to the *Pipal,* give way. *Al + Mavu* (*Pipal* and Mango), when united, becomes *Almavu,* Atman, the Being. It is a familiar sight to see the devout Nairs taking circumambulation of the Althara for seven times after his early bath in the temple tank.

The Arya-Veppu :

Arya-Veppu (Margosa or *Neem*) is found together with a *Pipal* in most of the Bhagavati temples. The *Arya-Veppu* is sacred to the goddess Kali. No other deity tenants it, as Kali is very powerful. The destruction of an *Arya-Veppu* is sure to invite the wrath of the goddess. A branch of Margosa is carried by those who want to masquerade as Kali in their hands. During house-warming ceremonies, festoons made from the leaves of the Margosa and Mango trees are hung on the doorways and roof. This is to appease the spirits that lurk in the new house, and to drive away the devils inhabiting the wooden portions of the house. Thus the house becomes devil-proof.

Erikku and Kadambu :

Erikku (*Calotropis gigantea*)—This shrub is grown in the compounds of temples. Lord Siva likes to wear everyday a garland made of *erikku* flowers. No other deity seems to like it. Hence, it is not grown in homesteads.

The *Kadambu* tree (Indian Oak) is sacred to Lord Muruga. Though the silk cotton tree serves as an object of mock marriage before a bachelor espouses a widow among some castes of the Bombay Presidency, it was invoked by the Kings in southern parts of India for granting blessings before they proceeded to the battlefields.

War and Flowers :

Trees were the royal emblems of the three ancient dynasties of Southern India. The Cheras selected the palm leaves, the Pandyas the *Arya-Veppu* leaves and the Cholas *Atti* (the holy mountain ebony) flowers as their emblems. The fragrant *Sirisa* or *Vagai* was worshipped

at the temple of the goddess of victory. The wearing of *Vitchi* (scariet *ixora*) signified that raids were imminent. The retreaders could be indentified by their wearing the Indian globe-thistle flowers. Those who laid siege wore Balloon vine flowers and the besieged wore flowers of *nocci* (the five-leaved chaste tree). *Vanchi* (*Glabrous Mahua*) flowers were worn by kings who were marching through the territories of another with a view to annexation. The defence of the realm was signified by wearing *Kanchi* (River portia) flowers. *Tumbai* (Flower toombai) was worn by the soldiers in active service. Victory was always celebrated by wearing the *Vagai* flowers.

The Nairs made garlands of Shoe flower (*Hibiscus Rosa Sinensis*) for their cannon, and for hanging garlands made of them to their war-elephants. The petals of this flower are employed for blackening shoes. Women use the flower for dyeing their hair and eye-brows black. The red variety of this flower is offered as *Para* to goddesses.

3. Trees of destiny :

Worship of trees is so firm-rooted in the community that every one has got a Tree of destiny. The Tree of destiny is determined according to the birth of a person which falls on a particular day of the lunar month. A lunar month has got only 27 days and each day is presided over by a particular constellation. As soon as a baby is born, his *Nal* (lunar asterism) is ascertained and his Tree of destiny found out. Persons born on particular constellations against whom the Trees of destiny are indicated in the table given in the next page should not cut the trees. He is expected to pay due regard to the tree throughout his life.

4. Sylvan Deities and Sacred Groves :

The forests of Kerala abound with godlings of many varieties. Each caste has its own peculiar sylvan deity. The sylvan deity at Sabarimala has transcended the barriers of Kerala and Madras. The Sastha, or Aiyappan, at Sabarimala, commands the respect of the whole of the southern peninsula without any distinction of caste, creed or colour. Nairs pay their respects to this glorious sylvan deity after abstaining from intoxicating drinks, non-vegetarian meals, and ladies for 41 days. We have numerous good accounts of this sylvan deity and as such it is not wise to devote time and space to give a description here.

TABLE OF TREES OF DESTINY

S. No.	Nal or Nakshatra (Malayalam)	Equivalent Nakshatra in Indian Astrology	Day of the Lunar asterism	English Equivalent	Longitude	Tree with its botanical name
1	Aswati	Aswini	1st 1. a.	Beta Arietis	13°20′	Kanjiram (Nux Vomica tree)
2	Bharani	Bharani	2nd 1. a.	35 Arietis	26°20′	Nelli (Phyllanthus Emblica)
3	Kartika	Krittika	3rd 1. a.	Eta Tauri	40°0′	Atthi (Ficus oppositifolia)
4	Rohini	Rohini	4th 1. a.	Aldebaran	53°20′	Njaval (Zyzygium Jambolanum)
5	Makayiram	Mrigashirsha	5th 1. a.	Lambda Orionis	66°40′	Karingali (Mimosa Catechu)
6	Thiruvathira	Adra	6th 1. a.	Alpha Orionis	80°0′	Karimaram (Terminalia alata)
7	Punartham	Punarvasu	7th 1. a.	Beta Geminorum	93°20′	Mula (Bamboo)
8	Pooyam	Pushya	8th 1. a.	Delta Cancri	106°40′	Arayal (Ficus religiosa)
9	Ayilyam	Ashlesha	9th 1. a.	Alpha Hydroe	120°0′	Nakam (Heritiera Littoralis)
10	Makam	Magha	10th 1. a.	Regulus	133°20′	Peral (Ficus Indica)
11	Pooram	Purva Phalguni	11th 1. a.	Delta Leonis	146°40′	Plasu (Butea frondosa)
12	Uthtram	Uttara Phalguni	12th 1. a.	Beta Leonis	160°0′	Iththi (Ficus Venosa)
13	Attham	Hasta	13th 1. a	Delta Corvi	173°20′	Ampazham (Spondias Mangifera—Hogplum)
14	Chitthira	Chitra	14th 1. a.	Spica Virginis	186°40′	Koovalam (Crateva Religiosa)
15	Chothi	Swati	15th 1. a.	Arcturus	200°4′	Neermaruthu (Pentaptera arjuna)
16	Visakham	Vishakha	16th 1. a.	Alpha Libroe	213°20′	Vayyamkathuku (Sida retusa)
17	Anizham	Anuradha	17th 1. a.	Delta Scorpio	226°40′	Ilanji (Mimusops elengi)
18	Threketaa	Jyestha	18th 1. a.	Antares	240°0′	Vetti (Physalis Flexuosa)
19	Moolam	Mula	19th 1. a.	Lambda Scorpii	253°20′	Pine
20	Pooratam	Purva Ashadha	20th 1. a.	Delta Sagittari	266°40′	Vanni (Prosopis Spicigera)
21	Uthtratam	Uttara Ashadha	21st 1. a.	Sigma Sagittari	280°0′	Pilavu (Jack tree)
22	Onam	Shravana	22nd 1. a.	Alpha Aquiloe	293°20′	Eurkhu (Calotropis gigantea)
23	Avittam	Dhanistha	23rd 1. a.	Beta Delphinum	306°40′	Vanhi (Plumbago Ceylanica)
24	Chathayam	Satha Bhishag	24th 1. a.	Lambda Aquarius	320°0′	Katambu (Nauclea Cadamba)
25	Pururuttathi	Purva Bhadrapada	25th 1. a.	Alpha Pegasi	333°20′	Mango tree
26	Uthrattathi	Uttara Bhadrapoda	26th 1. a.	Gama Pegasi	346°40′	Karimpana (Borassus flabelliformis)
27	Revathi	Revati	27th 1. a.	Zeta Piscum	360°0′	Irippa (Bassia latifolia)

1.a=lunar asterism

A Nair household has its own sacred serpent-grove which is nothing but a remnant of the primeval forest set apart for rendering due reverence to trees. Serpents might have taken their abode later on in these groves. No one dares to cut a tree from these groves, lest it invites the wrath of serpents. A lamp with a cotton wick immersed in cocoanut oil is kept near the sacred grove. The decayed trees of the serpent-grove are not used for fire-wood. However, serpent-groves are becoming a thing of the past.

5. Worship of boats etc. :

Kerala being a country indented by rivers and backwaters, boats were in frequent use. The boat-race of Kerala has won the admiration of the rest of India. Sailors and fishermen worshipped their boats before they launched them to the open sea. A cocoanut feast is held on the new moon of the month of Chingam or between August 15th and September 15th. At this time the south-west monsoon is supposed to have terminated, cocoanuts and other fruits are taken to the sea and launched into it. After this ceremony the coast is considered open for crafts from Bombay southward. Periodical offerings of cocoanuts are made to the boats to palliate the wrath of the spirit inhabiting its planks.

6. Representation of tree figurines etc. in the traditional ornaments :

The marriage badge of Nair ladies is called *Tali,* which is a replica of a *Pipal* leaf. The *Minnu* gold chain is fashioned after a *Pipal* leaf. The *Palakkamala,* a chain resembling the leaflets of *Pala* is another ornament which has got a vestige of tree-worship. The *Pavakkamala* is modelled after the seeds of the bitter gourd. There are many other traditional ornaments which have leaves, flowers etc. as their motif.

Conclusion

Tree-worship is widely prevalent among the Nair society even today. Trees, shrubs and plants that have association with the birth and death ceremonies have been left out of the scope of this article. Similarly the significance of trees standing in public places has not been traced.

Satya Prakash Arya

PLANTLORE IN WESTERN U. P.

The whole of Indian folk-culture is represented by some specific types of trees, plants, bushes, creepers and grasses which enjoy importance as objects of divinity and sacredness, particularly to the traditional devotees, having faith in the old mythology. Most of them symbolise the commonly believed gods and goddesses and about which a peculiar ideology is prevalent among the country folks, expressed in various forms of folklore. Besides the importance to worshippers, there are trees and plants which, either of their own or through some products of theirs, fruit, flowers, leaves, etc. serve our society and culture and are generally used at various occasions of importance.

In the olden days, among the objects of nature, i.e., rivers, mountains, vegetation, etc., people despite their lack of scientific knowledge, used to feel that a blessing or curse could be caused by some plants or trees standing in the neighbourhood. Authorities have, at certain places, referred to the primitive tribes which had no theoretical knowledge of sex except their feeling of the biological need and its satisfaction. If a baby was born, its birth was treated as a gift granted by nature through the medium of a tree in the vicinity, often an object of close contact, specially in case of those trees as are found inside the residential boundaries. The handsome or ugly shape and complexion were compared to the beauty or other characteristics of the blossoming plant, the type of its flowers, etc. If any unpleasant happening or a death was caused, the trees all around were blamed for, cursed for bringing misery.

Almost on the same lines, we may trace the general psychology of people in this region at least who hold that trees can bring peace and consolation to mankind and may accomplish the desires of people, if sincerely worshipped. Vegetation is an expression of nature and can equally serve the purpose of worship to the divine gods which either itself represents gods and goddesses or which is supposed to be inhabited by them.

The concept of a living-soul existing in trees, forms a strong belief among the country folk, as against the controversial view to treat them as inanimate or dead objects. It is considered that the plant has life like a human being and although they cannot move, yet they have feel-

ings and emotions. They like mankind need a certain amount of care and favourable environment, for their development. It is a common belief that one should not make water or ease from pressure under or near any type of vegetation, specially under the sacred trees. Any undesirable activity near them may bring worse consequences. On certain occasions, the green plants, particularly the fruit-bearing trees, suffer from painful feeling if a menstruating woman touches them during her monthly course. Moreover, the pregnant woman is either kept away from or required to take rounds of, particular trees. In the night, it is considered to be a great sin to pluck flowers, fruit or leaves, or cause disturbance to their sleep in any other way. The liberals think the restriction with scientific view that the vegetation discharges carbon-dioxide in the night which is injurious for human health. Some of the smaller bushy plants even go to the climax to feel and bow down by a small jerk of air or by merely touching, so tender they are. The others, if felt badly-insulted, never flourish again and go on drying down, their greenish element of freshness disappears after sometime. Still some specific plants feel the hands of particular persons and if seed is sown or are transplanted by them, shall never blossom or develop well, unless they are given special smoke or smell or certain herbs burnt near them. Much of this tendency is observed in vegetable plants. People of this area believe that a green tree should not be cut down as it has its life, and it will be just similar to taking away the life of a man. A father who has a son is especially guided by a moral restriction, not to cut down green trees. To cut even a few branches from it is considered to make it the same as a lame or invalid man whose hands on feet or other organs have been severed away. Others believe, for the safety of some hidden treasures of the old forefathers kept underground, below the roots, the tree itself and more often poisonous living being (snakes and scorpions etc. or giants and fairies) serve as sentries and restrict other people from digging it away, except the genuine owners.

It is considered that evil spirits and ghosts reside in old tall tree and persons happening to sleep or take rest or even pass near it, particularly in the night, are victimsed. Such persons are terrified often by fearful dreams during sleep. Some have the power to attract the other living beings towards them, suck their blood and kill them down. Plants have a magical bearing in the sense that the sorcerers, giving a chit of certain written hymns (*mantra-tantra*) etc., advise the elient to tie it to a branch having green leaves and thus bring an imitative and similar reaction on the person concerned.

It can, therefore, be safely said that the concept of living soul in

vegetation seems to be true according to the folk belief. This creates among people, a compulsory feeling of awe and under pressure, they are compelled to frame certain taboos and restrictions regarding trees and plants. Trees and plants often represent the totem-symbol here in this part also and form an object of extreme devotion, mostly to the orthodox rural womenfolks. So morning and evening prayers in different forms, ritual tales, hymns and repetitive couplets are narrated to them. They are offered food and water by the worshippers, after early-morning baths. Vegetation of such importance, therefore, forms a sacred and pious matter. Different kinds of folk festivals and typical rituals can be noticed in this area.

The importance of a particular plant is seen in the form of *Avtars* (above of deities) and with this confidence, they are worshipped. Their fruits and flowers are offered to favourite gods and goddesses and distributed as *prasad* to the participants in the worship. There are others who believe also that taking rounds of such trees and observing fasts may bring complete emancipation to them from the worries and problems of this world.

Moreover, some of the trees carry important historical antecedents for their growth and past happenings of a particular type are associated with them. While many occupy a significant position in the Hindu mythology, relating to right or wrong acts of human beings, the others have a hygienic stress, from the point of view of curing certain diseases, or plants providing herbs for medical use.

Sociologically speaking, the vegetation forms an important basis of folklore, consisting of ballads, legends, epics, folk-songs and tales, etc. Many riddles and proverbs, idioms, similies and metaphors or common dialect refer to the plants and their products, thus sufficiently enriching the folk-literature.

The folk-art includes drawings and paintings of certain tree-symbols and can often be seen on the walls of rooms and kitchens in the rural areas. The formation of clans (*Gotras*) is very closely related to some common plants. It is an usual practice to give names and surnames to children symbolising specific vegetation, specially flowers. This carries a peculiar psychological significance and often affects mankind in various ways in the future life. The whole of Indian literature, folk or classical, speaks of some popular trees in various historical and religious-philosophical descriptions. To the farmers, plants of foodgrains or those concerned with different seasons, are quite favourite. The natural beauty can be tasted through the ornamental and flowering vegetation.

Samir Ghosal

TREE IN FOLK LIFE

We will consider here the intimate relationship of tree with man. Sometimes it was represented as the source from which the human race originally sprang, sometimes, conversely, as the object into which the soul might return after death, or into which an individual might be transmuted, body and soul, by some miraculous agencies.

Man first worshipped trees as gods. Later on, a belief originated that trees were the dwelling places of supernatural beings—evil-gods, ghosts, and goblins.

Extensive researches done after exacavations at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa have established the fact that tree-worship was essentially a characteristic of the pre-Aryan people. The nude terracotta figurine discovered from Harappa and identified by John Marshall as the mother-goddess is a symbol of *Linga*-worship of the non-Aryan people or in other word it is a pre-Aryan deity. * *Sakambhari* (deity composed of nine plants) is also a non-Aryan goddess. *Vana Durga* or Durga of the forest is a primitive deity.

In Aryanised India tree-worship inevitably became subordinated to other cults, alien or semi-allien.

Although tree-worship is an ancient cult, originating in the pre-Aryan ages, it has not yet become obsolete in India. It has naturally undergone changes in ideas and forms. The oldest idea was that the human being owes his origin to the tree. In later stages,

(i) the tree came to be accepted not as the source, but as the scene of a miraculous birth ;

(ii) its supposed connection with a human being was explained by metamorphosis legends ;

(iii) the tree came to be regarded as symbol of fecundity.

In the whole range of human society there is nothing more pro-

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*Details on it published in Appendix II of this volume. Acharya Jogeschandra Ray Vidyanidhi had a different theory. He was not in agreement with Marshall or Dikshit or the identification of the others. He believed these figurines as play dolls of the non-Aryan people and had tried to establish his theory in his book *Puja Parban*, Calcutta 1358 B. S.—Ed.

foundly beautiful and inspiring than a religious service. But in order to appreciate it, we must either take it literally or have a deep sense of its symbolic meaning.

The mind of a man is seen to be ideas, moving from one place to another according to the stage of his development. In the first stage, man had nature-tree-spirit worship. He saw gods everywhere. It was not an intellectual conception at all—it was an extension of consciousness. The primitive and crude ideas and beliefs of the pre-Vedic ages were modified by the more refined Vedic thoughts at a later period. In modern times the new ideas, beliefs and rituals have crept into this folk practice of the Hindus owing to the influence of Western, Buddhist and Jaina cultures.

If we trace the development of this aspect of Indian folk religion, we will see : at first it was a popular religion which was practised by all the inhabitants. In this stage the folk practice and rites of this country were not very different from that of others. Then, due to the growth of sectarian spirit and religious consciousness, this religion developed various characteristics. The Brahmins introduced certain rites and rituals to exploit the common people and thereby certain changes took place. With the advent of further progress we notice, in the next, gradual deviations from the old ideas and thoughts. So, rites and rituals popular among the village folks are usually not liked and sometime termed as uncultured by the sophisticated people.

In dealing with these we observe that the earliest form of temple or a place of worship was a tree. Originally there was no temple built to gods. Huge shady trees were supposed to be the abode of some unseen powers or gods.

When big temples were erected for gods who were believed to have their abode in the shade of certain trees, people took special care not to remove these trees.

Another point.

The trees have some relation with the human birth. "It was usual thing, specially among the Romans, to plant a tree at the birth of a son, and from its vigour to forecast the prosperity of a child." *

Let us turn now to the idea of a community tree. It is as important as a family tree. The ancient fig tree under which Romulus and Remus were found, were held to be so closely connected with the fortunes of

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* The Triumph of the Tree by John Stewart Collin, p. 96.

the deity. So, when it began to show signs of decay the Romans were overcome with terror.

We quote the following where we see : "In the folklore of many peoples of the world, the great tree, evergeen, ever looming, ever bearing, whose fruit assures its eater of immortality ; also the great tree that is the essence of all trees. To different groups different trees were identified with the tree of life : the apple of the Celts, the peach of the Chinese, the date of the Semites, etc. The tree of life that stood in the Garden of Eden was not the prohibited tree, which was the tree of knowledge of good and evil." (*Folklore Dictionary, New York, p. 1123*). We may mention a story on the origin of Madura temple quoting The *Thiruvilaiyadapuranam* from Subramaniam Pillai's article. It "tells that Indra, after killing *Vrindhasura,* a giant was caught by the curse of *Brahmahatta* and he was advised to come down to the earth to *wash off his sins.* There, when he passed through a wood of *Kadamba* tree, the Brahmahatta bade farewell to him and he became once again free and happy. Searching the woods to find out the cause for the happy change, he discovered god Siva in the form of a *Lingam* ensconsed under the shade of a beautiful *Kadamba* tree. There he caused to built a magnificent *vimana* or turreted canopy and worshipped the deity. Thus was founded the Madura temple and the forest of *Kadamba* (*Kadamba Vana*) became the city of Madras" (*Tree worship and Opilatory, p. 8*). A mighty temple has been created later for Lord Siva and the *Kadamba* tree become sacred to Siva. It is interesting to note here that the *Kadamba* tree is sacred to Lord Krishna in Bengal. Sri S. Pillai states that "in almost all the Kali temples of the South India a margosa tree will be found in precincts....This shows the affinity of the Kali with this Tree" (Ibid, p. 14). So there is the feeling among the folk people that the cutting down of a margosa tree is considered equivalent to the murder of an innocent girl.

Some random examples of tree in relation to human life have been collected from various sources here. It is believed by the Hindus that the tree has consciousness like men. *Dharmasashastra* states, trees are a form of men or in other word it is a form of men's rebirth owing to his consequence of action (*Karmaphal*). So *Shastra* says

तमसा बहुरूपेन वेष्टिताः कर्महेतुनाः
अन्तःसंगा भवन्त्येते सुखदुःखसमन्विताः (मनु १म)

That is why there is the directive of all the Hindus to go to the forest after fifty years of age and lead a peaceful life, free

from all sorts of worries and anxieties and in communion with the gods. This *banaprastha* was an ideal system. It is not only men who went to the forest for meditation, gods also were supposed to do so. So we see Lord Siva absorbed in meditation under the foot of a *deodar* tree. In this connection we refer to Lord Buddha, who attained light of wisdom in his mediation beneath the holy Bodhi. In modern time we hear of Ramakrishna practising 'sadhana' under the shade of *panchavati* (assemblage of five sacred trees) in Dakshineswar, near Calcutta. Although Buddha and Ramakrishna are considered saintly men and not gods still we have been tempted to refer them for point of information.

In olden days the worship of trees were in practice from huts of the poor to the palaces of the kings. Each and every family of ancient Hindus planted different kinds of trees. Womenfolk used to clean the foot of *Ashoke* tree, [it will not be out of place to mention here that Ravana of the great epic Ramayana had also his *Ashokevan* (forest of Ashoke) where he kept Sita, the wife of Ramchandra, who was stolen by him from the bower of Ramchandra. If Ravana is represented as a non-Aryan king, then Ashoke tree supplied afflatus even to the non-Aryan or tribal people], paint the cleaned area with liquid rice paste to mark it as a sacred place for worship, make homage to it at dawn and ended the rite by lighting a lamp under the base of the sacred basil, or the root of *Bel* (*Aegle marmelos*), *Ashoke* or the like sacred trees which they consider as *thakurthan* (the abode of the god). We will consider here some process of tree worship.

We start with the worship of the plantatin-plant lady.

Plantain-plant lady has been identified with *Lakshmi*. It is a seasonal and agricultural deity and popularly known as *Nabapatrika* The worshippers cut a life-size plantain-plant and they dress it up as a newly-wedded bashful woman. They put a pair of wood-apples, which serve the purpose of a pair of breasts of the lady. * This pair of wood-apples is supported by a piece of sugarcane. The leaves of the plant are twisted like a bow with the help of the fibre of the plant. They represent the head and hair of the lady. The other plants *Kachu* (arum), *Haidra* (turmeric), *Jab* (barley), *Darimba* (pomergranate), *Ashoke* (Saroca Indica) and *Dhanya* (paddy) represent different parts

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* The relationship of breasts with wood-apples are described by Piyushkanti Mahapatra in his article—"Tree symbol worship in Bengal". He has also narrated the role of nine plants in *nabapatrika*.—Ed.

of the body like ear, nose, female organ and so on. This *Nabapatrika* is worshipped as *Lakshmi*. Again, we see her in the *mandap* of *Durga Puja* as the wife of *Siddhidata Ganesh,* the son of Devi Durga and a brother of Lakshmi. It is also known as *Naba Durga*. It is placed in the front of a *Bel* tree which is worshipped for invocation of Durga. This is an adjustment with pre-Aryan and Brahminical rites. How *Lakshmi,* the primitive daity became the goddess of wealth is stated in the *Shastras*. It is said, when the ocean was churned *Lakshmi* appeared. The gods were pleased to come accross this beautiful woman and offered her to *Vishnu,* who agreed to marry her. But Lakshmi said, how can the younger sister be wedded when the *elder sister* [It is the Brahmins who made the non-Aryan Lakshmi as *A-Lakshmi* to introduce Lakshmi as the goddess of wealth] remain unmarried ? This remark of the goddess testify that *A-Lakshmi* is elder so she can be treated as a premitive deity. Vishnu appreciated the sentiment of Lakshmi. In order to have her as His spouse He married *A-Lakshmi* first but soon after the marriage He left *A-Lakshmi*. *A-Lakshmi* then went away and "took her shelter on a tree (*asvattha*) and began to cry aloud. Her younger sister Lakshmi took pity on her and appeared there along with Her husband (Vishnu) to console her. Vishnu said, 'O *A-Lakshmi,* this *asvattha* tree has sprung up from a portion of mine, so dwell though !' *A-Lakshmi* somehow accepted Vinshun's advice and from this the worship of the goddess of wealth has been established. The plantain-plant-lady or *'Nabapatrika'* mentioned above is seen in the *mandap* of Durga Puja has been taken by some scholars as Vana Durga. *"Vana Durga* or the Durga of the forest was originally a primitive deity and when the rite at a later date was Hinduised, she got a place at one corner of the *Mandap" (A study of Vrata Ritual, Dr. S. R. Das, p. 25).*

The village womenfolk worship *Vana Durga* in their own way. The following rite is gathered from a village of Mymensingh. The village womenfolks take *Sheora* tree (*Streblus asper*) as the abode of the deity. (In the previous paragraph we found her as plantain-plant and here it is a *Sheora* tree). There is no *mantras* to worship her. The village womenfolks recite and sing songs in question-and-answer form. This serve the purpose of *mantras*. They address the *Sheora,* on the top of which they believe *Vana Durga* lives, as *Sakhi* (friend). They say, look at us, oh, friend, we have brought clothes, ornaments, foods etc. for you. Be pleased and take our offerings which are sent to you by the husbands of your *Sakhis* who have assembled here. With these

words they come forward, touch the tree, kiss and embrace its trunk one after another.

The following chants are recited in group :

নামো নামো বনদুর্গা সাইট শেওড়ার নীচে

[Oh, Durga of the forest, do please come down from the tree, and meet us here under the *Sait Sheora tree* (a variety of Sheora tree)].

কি মতে নামিবাম আমি শাড়ী নাই মোর সাথে ?

[Thank you all friends, how can I come down ? I have no *Sari* (clothes to wear)]

সইয়ারে পাঠাইয়া দিছি শহর বাজারে ;

শাড়ী যে আনিছেন সইয়ার সিঙ্গিরায় বইলে

(Never mind friend, never mind, the husband of your friend has gone to the town market who will definitely bring red *Sari* for you).

নামো নামো বনদুর্গা সাইট শেওড়ার নীচে

(So, please do come down and accept our offerings, O Durga of the forest. Meet us under the *Sait Sheora* tree).

কি মতে নামিবাম আমি শঙ্খ সিন্দুর নাই মোর সাথে ?

[Thank you all friends. Besides *Sari* I have no *Sankha* (ornament made of conch-shell and is 'a must' for the married Hindu women) and vermilion (the married Hindu women use at the parting of their hair) which I can put at my hair-partin ?]

সইয়ারে পাঠাইয়া দিছি মুন্সীগঞ্জের হাটে

শঙ্খ সিন্দুর যে আনিছেন সইয়ার কাগজ বইলে

[Please dont worry for all these. The husband of your friend went to market of Munshiganj, who had brought *Sankha* and *Sindur* for you.]

The worshipper called her as *Durga Bhabani* who stays alone. The curious women folk ask her, how can she live alone ?

মায়ে ত জিজ্ঞাসা করইল দুর্গাগো ভবানী।

তরতি দুপুরিয়া কালে রইলা কেনে একেশ্বরী ?

(O friend, mummy asks how do you stay alone in the noon time ?)

The answer comes--

একলা নয়গো মা লগে পঞ্চ দাই

বাবাঠাকুরে শেওড়ার নীচে বইয়া পূজা খাই !

[You need not be worried my friend, I am not alone. I have five attendants. We eat the articles of the oblation of the worshipper make to *Baba Thakur* (village god)].

It is welknown that *Durga* is called in several names both in *shastras* and in folk sayings, such as—Durga, Uma, Skandamata, Sakambhari, Katyayani, Chandi, Durga Bhabani, Vijaya, Kali, Karali, Annapurna, Dasabhuja, Trinayani, Mahamaya, Haimavati, Ambika, Gauri, Himalayanandini, Shibani, Ulangini, Viswarupini, Bhubaneswari, Vana Durga and many others. So different sacred trees represent as the symbols of a different form of Durga which is also the case with other gods and goddesses.

It is stated that Durga is the goddess of uncultured tribes like Savaras and Pulindas who were fond of meat and wine. Perhaps she is *Vana Durga*. There are references to worship *Vana-Durga* before the performance of the ceremony of investiture of the sacred thread, of marriages and other ceremonies of an auspicious nature. At the worship of this goddess, offerings of a puffed rice (*khai*), fried flattened rice (*chira bhaja*), powdered rice (*chaler-gura*), plantain with pips (*bichaykala*) and the like things are offered. Duck's eggs stained with vermilion are also needed for this worship. Animals are sacrificed at this puja. On the last day on which the ceremonial uncleanliness caused by the birth of a child ceases, the aforementioned offerings are given to *Vana Durga*. This is called "the Barana" of the tree trunk (*gacher gurir barana*). It is observed that *Vana-Durga* is worshipped at the foot of the *Kamini* tree (*Murrava exotica*) at Comilla, Eastern Pakistan. The curious feature of this cult is that twenty-one beasts and birds, the eating of whose fiesh is forbidden to orthodox Hindus, are sacrificied to her. Barbars cut the throats of these beasts by means of a razor. The twenty-one fowls or cocks are not actually sacrificed but are cooped up in a cage and placed at a distance, water is sprinkled on these, and thereby, they are consecrated as offering to her deityship.

Another variation of *Vana Durga* as *Vana Devi* or *Vahu Thakurani* is believed to preside over woods and forests. The womenfolk, who celebrate her worship, make semi-circular bracelets of rice-flower paste, coloured red at one end and yellow at the other liquefied rice flower paste of the same colour. These bracelets symbolise the invisible shadowy spirit of the tree-goddess. The celebrating womenfolk make a travesty of the goddess's favourite habitate—the forest—by sticking into their courtyards small twigs of the hibiscus shrub and the *Sheora* tree.

A miniature tank is excavated in the courtyards. Round the edges of the tank, ornamental scroll-work and floral designs are done with liquefied rice-flour paste.

The interesting features of this worship are,

"(i) the absence of an image of the tree-spirit or tree-goddess *Vana Durga* or *Vana Devi*,
(ii) the construction of miniature forest with the twigs of *Sheora* tree and the hibiscus shrub ;
(iii) the excavation of a miniature tank with ornamental scroll work and floral designs painted all round its edge with liquefied rice-flour paste ;
(iv) the making of bracelets with rice-flour paste and placing the same upon strips of the leaf-saptha of the plantain tree,
(v) the act of celebrating womenfolk taking up in their hands the bracelets made of rice-flour paste, whiie listening to the legend ;
(vi) the spilling of the liquefied red-coloured rice-flour paste upon the miniature forest and into the miniature tank" (Quoted from S. C. Mitra's 'On the cult of tree-goddess in Eastern Bengal, Man-in-India, Vol. II, 1922).

Nim tree (*Azdirachra indica*) is a most useful tree. It has unique medicinal value. Many scholars have described the worship of this tree in a variety of way. We will consider here a typical form of worship of *Nim* (in its absence *Bel*) tree current perhaps only in Bengal. This is called *Pat-Gonsai*. This *Pat Gonsai* or *Nil Puja* is fixed on the 29th *Chaitra* (middle of April) according to the Bengali Calander. Prior to three days or three weeks of the festival the village-folks prepare *Pat-Gonsai* with the trunk of a straight *Nim*. Its length usually varies from 2 ft. 5 inches to 6 ft. 7 inches. The upper portion or the head part of *Pat-Gonsai* is blended and an iron wheel together with a trident are placed on it. The entire body of *Pat-Gonsai* is covered with a piece of red cloth (*Lal Salu*) except the pointed portion or the head which is plastered with oil and vermillion (*Tel-Sindur*) and so it glimmers. There are different processes and varieties of this working. Some take it as the worship of the tree-trunk. Another variety of the 'goddess of tree trunk' may be observed which is worshipped at the foot of *Udumba* tree. At many places the foot of the worshipped tree is built up with a *pucca* masonry platform.

Besides these folk practices, we can cite profuse illustrations quoting ancient classic literature. We know Aryans frequently mentioned invocations to plants, as also to rivers, mountains, the heaven and the earth as deities. The whole of the Hymn (X 97) of the Rig

Veda is devoted to singing of the praises of creative properties of plants (*Oshadhi*). Here are two Hymns. Rig Veda says—

मधुमतीरोषधीर्द्याव आपो मधूमन्नो भवत्वन्तरिक्षम् ।
क्षेत्रस्य पतिर्मधूमान्नो अस्त्व—रिष्यन्तो अन्नेनं चरेम् ॥ (४।५७।३)

and thus Atharva Veda—

समीक्षयवन्तु तविषाः सुदानवो—ऽपांरसा ओषधीभिः सचन्ताम ।
वषैस्य सर्गा महयन्तु भुमिं
पृथग जायन्ताम ओषधोयो विश्वरुपाः
पृथग जायन्ताम वीरूधो बिश्वरुपाः (४।१५।२-३)

A discriminating reader will come across a great many rituals on tree and god. Following is a sample,

"The god Siva and His spouse—Parvati—were engaged in amorous dalliance in a solitary place. Now the whole host of the other gods ordered Agni—the god of fire—to disguise himself as a Brahmana and sent him in his guise to that place. Seeing that the god of fire had intruded upon their privacy, the goddess Parvati became very much enraged and pronounced the following curse upon the other gods who were his aides and abetters—"May you all be reborn in the shape of trees." Under the influence of this curse the god Brahma was metamorphosised into a *Palasa* tree (*Butea frondosa*), the god Vishnu as an *Asvattha* (or Pipal) tree ; and the deity Rudra (or "the Howler") into a *Vat* tree (*Ficus indica*). (Padma Puran, Uttarkanda).

In the celebrated philosophical poem the *Bhagavadgita* the Supreme Being Vishnu in his incarnation as Krishna, says to Arjuna—

"Know ye that of all the trees I am the *Asvattha* tree".

Another exemple may be quoted from S. C. Mitra who witnessed a practice on 16-8-1920 in a village of Bihar. He writes—"a Bihari woman of the maid-servant class was worshipping this tree with numbling of prayers and giving of offerings. She said that the Pipal tree was the *Bishnu-Bhagwan* or incarnation of the supreme deity Vishnu and that she was worshipping it in order that the god might confer the boon of recovery on her ailing daughter who had been unwell for some time. At about midday on the same day she came to that tree, placed before it her offerings, namely, a cupful of unboiled milk (*Kacha Dudh*), some sugar and some flowers, knelt down before it with her head bowed down, touched the ground and remained in this posture for some time. Most likely all the while she was mumbling some prayer

to the deity for her sick daughter's recovery. Then she arose and went away. It is said that sometimes in lieu of unboiled milk, an offering of lights was made, that is to say, two *chirags* were lighted and placed at the foot the tree. On further enquiry from her she said that she would go on performing this quaint ceremony for offering her daughter's cure, till the ensuing Kali Puja".*

The rite of *Bhant* Puja (*Clerondendrum infortunatume flower*) may also be mentioned here. It is collected from Satkhira sub-division of Khulna District, now in Eastern Pakistan. This is also a worship of a *Sheora* tree which continues for three consecutive days. The time for this worship is three days prior to the *Chiatra Sankranti* (middle of April). This flower blossoms at this time. Peasants of all ages join in the function. The Puja starts in the early morning and continues for almost the whole day. The Puja party gather near *Ash-Sheora* tree (a variety of Sheora tree. Previously we have seen another variety of its as *Sait-Sheora* as the abode of *Vana-Durga*). The requisites are : *Bhant* flower which are to be plucked at the time of the puja and several pots of water. The women sing several songs which serves the purpose of the *mantras*. At the end of each song some flowers are offered to the sait-Sheora tree, women pour water on its root and come away. Here no *Shastriya* or Brahminical rites are observed. the same practice continues for all the three days till *Chaitra Samkranti.** On this day the worshippers switch over to *Gajan, Del Puja* or *Hazra Bhog*. *Hazra* or *Siva* is treated as a 'Bhut' or a spirit.†

The relation of tree in the ancestor-worship is an important aspect. We observed in Keora, P. S. Jhalakathi, Dt. Barisal, (now Eastern Pakistan) the villagers burn the dead body cutting a mango-tree. No wood other than this is believed to be sacred for the buring. The attendants of the dead are called *kathuria* (wood cutter) because they will cut and make it into pieces to burn the dead body. The procession of the dead is split up into four batches. In the first batch the relations of the dead convey the sacred fire and the sacrificial vessels. Behind them, the second batch carries the dead body, the third batch consists of a she-animal, a cow or a she-goat of one colour and the last batch consists of the other fellows.

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* On the worship of the Pipal tree in North Bihar, Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society, Patna, December, 1920.

** Last day of the year according to Bengali Calandar.

† Informant—Prakash Sanyal.

When a funeral rite is observed for a person dead in a foreign land or whose bones cannot be found a figure is made with three hundred and sixty leaves of *kusa grass* (D*esmostachya bipinnata*) or with the same number of twigs of *Udumbara* (*Ficus glomerata*) or with the *Palasa* distributed so as to represent the several parts of human body. According to a fancied analogy of the number this system varies according to different Hindu *Shastras*. Here is a system :

A cocoanut will be the head of the fancied image, a bottle-ground—the palate, five guaves—the mouth, a plantation fruit—the tongue, two cowries—the two eyes, sands—the nose, *palasa* leaves—the ears, the shoots of fig tree—the hair, the fibre of lotus plants—an entrall, earth—fat, sulphur and the yellow orpiment—exerement sesame-paste—joints, barley paste—flesh, fish, honey—blood, the skin of an antelope—skin, common lemons—the breasts, a lotus—the nostrils, a lotus—the navel, the egg plant—the scrotum or the bag which contains testicles, the root of the Ganja plant—the male organ, the husks—the garment.

The Brahmins play a very important role in Sradha rite. The substitute of a Brahmin is the image of a Brahmin made of *Kusa* grass. The cushion of *Kusa* grass is essential for the sons of the dead and for whom who touch the fire to the mouth of the dead. Sometimes it is also formed of *Durba* grass. The post (*Brishakath*) we see is made as per the direction of scriptures. For this post, *Bel* or *Bakula* tree is needed. It will be five cubits long, octagonal in shape, with a crown on the top. It should be posted one cubit deep to the east of an altar. Some changes are now observed even in this.

Let us refer to another aspect where we see the trees bore men and women. An Italian traveller of fourteenth century was assured by the natives of Malabar that they know of trees, which instead of fruit bore pigmy men and women. So long as the wind blew they remained fresh and healthy, but when it dropped they became withered and dry" (Folkard, p. 75). A somewhat similar belief was familiar to the Arab geographers who tell of "a talking tree growing at the easternmost point of the habitable world, which bore young men and women on its branches in place of fruits." ('Humboldt' *Examen Critique*). According to Iranian account of the creation of the first human couple, Maschia and Maschiana issued from the ground in the form of a rhubarb plant (*Rheum ribes*) which at first single, but in course of time became divided into two. Ormuzd imparted to each human soul and they became the parents of mankind. It is widely known that

"when heaven and earth had been made, Odin and his brothers walking by the sea-shore came upon two trees. Then they changed into human beings, male and female. The first brother gave them soul and life ; and the second endowed them with wit and will to move ; and the third added face, speech, sight and hearing." (*The Pros* or *Younger Edda, trn. by G. W. Dasent, Stockholm, 1842).*

The legend current among the Sioux of the Leppes Missouri (North American Indian, U. S. A.) one seems to catch an echo from the Garden of Eden. Here the original parents, like trees from which they developed, at first stood firmly fixed to the earth, until a monster snake gnawed away the roots and gave them independent motion, just as in paradise the serpent destroyed the harmony and mutual trust which united Adam and Eve.

The Damaras of South Africa believe that the "universal progenitor was a tree, out of which came the Damaras, Bushmen, Oxen and Zebras, and everything else that lives." (F. Dalton *Narrative of an Explorer* etc., London, 1853).

In other legends human beings are represented as arising from the tree as its fruit.

The Mahabharata tells an enormous Indian fig tree from whose branches hung little devotees in human form.

The story is one of the many folktales concerning conversion of mortals into trees which Ovid has so gracefully elaborated in his *Metamorphosis.* One of the interesting metamorphosis concerns the fate of the three daughters and the Sun and Clymene, who were so heart-broken at the tragic fate of their brother Phaeton that they were changed into Poplars by the banks of the stream into which he had been hurled—the Ericlanus or Po. The tear they shed were preserved in the shape of Amber :

As she sent
To kneel Phaethusa, eldest born her feet
Felt stiffen, and Lampetie, at her cry
Starting, took sudden root, and strove in vain
For motion to her aid. The third, her hair
In anguish tearing, tore off leaves ! And now
their legs grew fixed as trunks, their arms as boughs
Extended, and upward, round them creeps a bark
That gradual folds the form entire, save yet
The head and the mouth, that to their mother shieks

For help, what help is hers to give ? Now here
Now there she rushes, frantic, kissing this
On that which yet she can, and strives to rend
Their bodies from the clasping bark and tears
The fresh leaves from their sprouting head, and sees
Aghast, red drops as from some wound distil.
And "Ah, forbear" ! the sufferers shieks, "Forbear"
O' mother dear ! Our babies in these trees
Alone are rent Farewell ! And o'er the words
Scare uttered, aloud the lark, and was still
But yet they weep ; and in the Sun their tears
To amber harden, by the clear stream caught
And borne, the gaud and grace of Latin maids*

Similar stories are found not only in the folktales of Bengal but also in other parts of India. The reference of the tales "Sat bhai champa' of Dakshinaranjan Mitra Majumdar's collection can be cited**.

The story of Bancis and Philemon—the worthy peasants who so hospitably entertained the gods, Zeus and Hermes, disguised as travellers, and their cottage was changed to temple and they themselves into priest and priestess—is more familiar one.

This popular story remind us the famous story of *Iswari Patni* of *Annadamangal* where by the touch of Devi Annapurna the ferry boat of *Iswari Patni* metamorphosied to a golden boat.

"As one more upon the hallowed steps,
Bowed now with years they stoods and to a knot
Of wondering hearers told the Temple's tale,
Surprised each saw the other's figures change
And sprout wits sudden verdure and as round
The form the rapid foliage spread, while yet
They could, one mutual found "Farewell" they took
One kiss, and over their faces cloud the bark
And both in the trees were hidden ! Still the bouth
That interlacing link the neighbour trunks"

These and many others clearly testify the relationship of tree with folk life.

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* Metamorphosis, tr. by Henry King, p. 78 London.

** Besides this, there is a reference of Oriya story referred to here in K. B. Das's The Plant in Oriss an folklore."—Ed.

H. M. Nayak

TREE CULT IN KARNATAKA

Very often India has shown up as a country with a baffling diversity of regions and peoples, customs and habits, religions and languages. But in all her apparent diversity, an underlying unity can be witnessed. This has been possible because of a deep understanding of life.

Karnataka (the present Mysore State) has made a unique contribution to the wealth of Indian culture. The way of life as well as the mode of thinking of the people of Karnataka is not quite a different one from the rest of the nation. Minor details apart, no belief or custom is peculiar only to Karnataka. A tradition like tree symbol worship is common all through the country.

The purpose of this essay is to give an outline of tree cult in Karnataka which has spread to an area of about 75,000 square miles, almost as large as the combined area of England and Scotland. For a thorough study of the subject a detailed survey should be undertaken. Then alone one can note peculiar characteristics of this popular religion from different regions of this state. So the present essay does not pretend to give a complete picture of tree symbol worship in this part of the country.

Indian cultural traditions are based on natural phenomena. Man and nature both pass through the cycle of life and death. Therefore, there is no wonder if our early men saw nature in terms of the orderly repetitive process of nature. *Upanishads* say : "A mortal ripens like corn, like corn is born again".[1] Several of our every-day activities, our folk music, our folk dances, and our festivals centre around agricultural and plantational events.

Forests play an important role in our national as well as in our individual life. So also trees. It has been said in a Kannada folksong, that it is better to be a tree being able to provide shade in the hot sun than to be a useless human being ! No wonder our ancestors began worshipping trees ! In the beginning only awe-inspiring and sky-scraping trees might have drawn their attention.

The history of tree worship is, indeed, very old in this country. It is the earliest form of worship in South India, according to N. Venkata Ramanaiah. "The temple which is invariably associated with Gods, had at one time no connection with them. The Gods were wor-

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1. Katha : I. 1. 6.

shipped in the form of trees".[2] Elaborating on this point he observes : "The typical deity of the South Indian village is the *gramadevata* or the village deity, who is generally lodged in a small shrine constructed on a primitive pattern. The shrine, however, marks a late stage in the development of the cult of the *gramadevata*. In a large number of villages the *gramadevatas* have no temples at all ; they are lodged in the open air in the shadow of a big tree. In a good number of villages, no object is placed to represent the deity. In all these places, the tree itself is regarded as the embodiment of the deity. This is the sacred tree of the village ; and it receives all acts of worship which are meant for the deity".[3]

About hundred years ago Capt. J. S. F. MacKenzie had observed some aspects of tree cult in Karnataka.[4] To our knowledge this is the only account available. In and around Bangalore Capt. MacKenzie found stones, under fig tree, having representations of serpents carved upon them These stones were kept on a stone platform. They were under the shade of two *pipal* (Ficus religiosa) trees. The two *pipal* trees, growing together, were considered to be male and female and were wedded by all necessary ceremonies as in the case of human beings. Near by in the same platform were grown a margosa and a *bilpatra* (a kind of wood-apple). They were supposed to be the living witnesses of the marriage of *pipal* trees. Since the expenditure is too heavy to perform the marriage, it was burdensome for ordinary men. Therefore, only one *pipal* and margosa were used to be found on the platform, representing man and woman in the view of common people. Explaining this view Capt. MacKenzie says that he was given to understand that the Saivite religion was connected, in some manner, with this form of tree cult. "The fruit of the *nimb* (margosa) and *bilpatra* is the only one which is any way resembles a *lingam* and by placing the fruit of either of these trees on the leaf of the *pipal* which represents the *yoni*, you have a fair representation of an entire *lingam*".[5]

A folk story gives, rather a different version. According to the story *pipal* represents seven beautiful daughters of a malignant spirit. One day when they were going to a near by river to take their bath, Lord Krishna saw them and fell in love with them. Krishna asked

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2. Venkata Ramanaiah, N : *An Essay on the origin of the South Indian Temple*, Madras, 1930, p. 76.
3. Ibid, p. 4.
4. MacKenzie, J.S.F. : 'Tree and Serpent Worship' *1A* IV (1875), p. 5.
5. *Ibid.*

them to marry him. They refused. Krishna did not leave them. Immediately the seven sisters transformed into a *pipal* tree to get rid of Krishna. At once Krishna became a margosa tree holding them (*pipal*) in a warm embrace. Afterwards it has become customary to worship *pipal* and margosa together.

Capt. MacKenzie also reports the circumstances under which men must marry plants.[6] If one has to take a third wife he should go through the tree marriage ceremony, correctly and carefully but not in every detail, with *ekke gida* (Calotropis gigantea). This should be looked upon as the third marriage, because the number three is an unlucky one. After this ceremony the *ekke gida* is cut down and burnt. Then alone the man will be free to marry his (fourth) wife without any fear of evil consequences. Instances are there that before the younger brother gets married, the unmarried elder brother marries a plantain tree, which is, after the wedding ceremony, cut down and the younger one is then free to marry. This performence not only gives permission for younger brother's marriage, but also provides the elder brother "the privileges of chewing betel nut, wearing flowers in the hair, using the sandal wood paste on the body and tying up the cloth behind in a particular manner which are the privileges of married people only."[7]

Even today Capt. MacKenzie's observations are held valid. Due to the advent of modern education and urbanization the queer beliefs and customs may not be widespread ; but they are not completely banished.

We get references to tree worship in the musings of Basaveshwara, a 12th century A.D. social reformer, who pooh-poohed the belief that trees are residences of spirits, deities or goddesses. In one of his *vacanas,* he particularly mentions *hiriyala*[8] (big banyan—Ficus indica) to be a place of shelter of some spirits of low order. May be Basaveshwara was advocating Veerashaiva belief ; but indications are there that tree worship was losing its spirit and significance.

In several parts of Karnataka every village considers a close by place, which is densely grown with trees, as the holiest. This may be a separate place or may be a particular point in a vast forest. Some huge trees in those places receive the offerings. The ceremony is known as *banada pooje* (worship of the forest). *Beditі* is the goddess of forest

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6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. "Halu moradigalalli, ura darigalalli ....."

in north Karnataka. She is worshipped by the offering of animals. According to Dr. Chidananda Murthi this practice is in vogue in one form or the other in other parts of Karnataka also.[9]

In north Karnataka worship of some local dieties or folk forms of goddess *Shakti* is in wide practice in rural areas. The three forms very well known are *Durgavva,* the goddess of cholera, *Dyamavva,* the goddess of plague and *Kariavva,* the goddess of measles, chicken pox and small-pox. Among these three *Dyamavva* happens to be the goddesses of the village (*gramadevata*). But in most cases the other two goddesses are also found in the same temple of *Dyamavva.* The common tree of all these three goddesses is margosa. All of them are fond of mango leaves. The devotees who worship more out of fear than real respect offer mango leaves.[10]

Tulasi (a type of Basil) is considered to be the holiest since it was sacred to Lord Vishnu. It is grown and worshipped in the courtyard of almost every Hindu home and tended with great care. *Garike* (Agrostis linearis retz) planted in a small round mass of cowdung, representing *Vinayaka* the remover of all obstacles, received the first and the foremost treatment in all ceremonies. An notable tree is *arali* (Ficus religiosa) to which women pray for children. Mention must be made of *tumbe* (Phlomis indica Linn.) which is held most sacred by many people.

Different trees are popularly assigned to different gods and goddesses in various parts of Karnataka and worshipped accordingly. To cite an example, in Davanagere Taluk of Chitradurga district, the popular belief regarding the residences of some gods and demons is as follows :

Trees :	*Gods or demons* :
1. banni (Prosopis spicigera)	1. Maha Kali.
2. arali (Ficus religiosa)	2. Chowdi (Chowdavva)
3. bevu (margosa)	3. Durgi (durgavva), Hanumatha and several malevolent spirits
4. bhilva (Bel tree)	4. Eshwara, Basava.
5. ala (Ficus indica)	5. Sri Rama
6. hunise (Tamarind tree)	6. Several minor deities.

9. Chidanada Murthy, M. : "amma, abbe, allama, badubbe" *Prabuddha Karnataka* ; p. 46.
10. Information through K.R.K.

Some, among Brahmins, worship *honge mara* (the tree Dalbergia oujeinensis Roxb). They consider it equal with the worship of Lord Eshwar. Therefore this tree is not even used as fuel.

People of *idiga* community (belonging to toddy-drawer's caste) worship *ichala mara.* It is obvious that the purpose of their worship is nothing but to get more today from the tree they worship.

A very interesting feature is that several families have their appellation with one tree or the other.

In addition to the trees mentioned above, there are several other trees which are closely connected with popular belief or folk religion. Tree cults, common the world over , are widespread in Karnataka where each village has its sacred tree or bush, the details of which as has already been said are yet to be worked out.*

* I am thankful to Dr. M. Chidananda Murthy, S. Narayana Setty, K.R. Krishnaswamy and my students in the Post-graduate Department of Kannada, for having kindly supplied some of the informations recorded here.

Piyushkanti Mahapatra

TREE-SYMBOL WORSHIP IN BENGAL

Tree worship is prevalent almost all over the world. It directs us to the animistic theory of nature. From the hoary past to modern period it has its influence on the concept of supernaturalism of every veriegated society both archaic and civilised. We see the developed idea of animistic theory of nature when the tree itself is worshipped with all ritualistic details as a deity.

In Bengal, tree-worship is neither an essential part of animism, nor it is nature-worship. Yet we find wide distribution of tree-worship in many parts of Bengal. The people do not harm or injure those trees by breaking off the branches or tearing the leaves. The roots, branches, leaves, flowers, fruits etc. of certain trees are essential ingredients for particular types of worships. The leaves or flowers of certain trees are necessary for the worship of particular deities. There are certain trees and plants which are the symbol of or associated with particular deities. The *asvattha* (Ficus religiosa) or the *pipala* tree and the *vata* (Ficus indica) or the banyan tree are sacred in Bengal.

In the religious history of the Bengalees the tree-symbol worship has played an important part from ancient times. Evidences of such type of worship in Bengal are abundant in later religious ceremonies and in idioms of rituals. There is a tendency in Bengal to assign a particular tree to a particular deity and also a tendency of polytheism in worshipping tree symbols. A particular tree symbolises a particular deity and this symbolic tree is revered, worshipped as a god—and as such many attributes of supernaturalism are associated with trees.

The tree-symbol worship in Bengal may be grouped in three major divisions according to the potentiality or nature of association with religious concepts. In the first stage the symbolic trees are concerned. The individual tree is symbolised as manifestation of individual gods or goddesses and worshipped accordingly.

The second stage catagorises the sacred trees. These are permanent or temporary residence of the deities. In the vicinity of the villages it will often be found that various votive offerings are made to the village divinities under these sacred trees. These supernatural powers

of varied potentialities watch over the interest, prosperity and destiny of the people. They also look after the people against unwanted calamity, famine, draught, epidemic and other evils to the individual or the community.

In the third stage the sacred plantation is concerned. Planting of a few trees of sacred nature is a further step in the development of tree-symbol worship. These sacred trees or plants are the seat of meditation, performed to earn merit which control every human action. The plantation of *panchavati* or five sacred trees and plantation of *asvattha* or *vata* are generally encouraged by Hindus to earn salvation.

II

Attempts have been made in this section to describe a few symbolic trees which are generally represented as gods or goddesses as mentioned in greater epics and religious books. As a result, these trees are revered by the Hindus who consider these as god-incarnate.

The *asvattha* (*Ficus religiosa*) or the pipala tree has an important part in the religious history of India. It is believed that *asvattha* is the symbol of Visnu, the All Protector. In Indian scriptures there is reference of *asvattha* tree.

The plantation of *asvattha* and the marriage between the *asvattha* and *vata* are popular rituals in Bengal. *Ghata* is the symbol of life of God. In the *ghata* five branches of sacred trees are used, the branch of *asvattha* is one of them. There is reference in the Holy Gita that Srikrisna said to Arjuna that *asvattha* tree is his symbol. According to Padmapurana (Uttarakhanda) Visnu took his birth as the *asvattha* tree following a curse by Ambarisa.

There is also reference of *asvattha* and its worship in the mediaeval Bengali literature. In *Chandimangala* by Mukundarama there is a story of a new township established by Kalketu, (the chief of the fowlers). Almost all the trees of forest except *asvattha* were cut down for the new township (*asvattha rakhila mula bandhiya*).

Besides, in scriptures and brahmanical worships *asvattha* has an important part in the folk religion. In upper Hindu society *asvattha* worship is prevalent among the womenfolk. There are stories of the vrata rituals, in which it is stated that a girl was in great distress for her disrespect to *asvattha* tree and she, after worshiping the tree came across all her distress and became fortunate.

In puranic and brahmanical idea *asvattha* is a symbol of Visnu.

But somewhere in local belief or in vrata rituals it is considered as goddess.

There is a vrata ritual in Bengal, which is called *"Asvattha-pata-vrata"*. This is observed by womenfolk on the last day of the month *Vaisakha* (April-May). Five leaves are required for this ritual. Each leaf signifies the different stages of human life and desire, green leaf for enchanting beauty, raw leaf for birth of a new son, old leaf for long life of husband, dry leaf for increase in happiness and wealth and withered and tornout leaf for precious wealth beyond expectation.

Somewhere *asvattha* is associated with Lakshmi. If an alter of clay is built up around the trunk of an *asvattha* tree, the man would have religious merit. It is pious work to pour water at the root of a *asvattha* in the month of *Vaisakha* (April-May). Regular salutation and showing of respect to *asvattha* tree result in longivity and prosperity.

Asvattha tree is associated with fertility, and it is worshipped by barren womenfolk for a child.

The *vata* (*Ficus Indica*) or the banyan tree is also worshipped like the *asvattha* tree. *Vata* has its association with *asvattha*. The banyan tree is worshipped on the *vata-savitri day* in different parts of Bengal. The *vata* tree is believed to be the symbol of Brahma. There is a system of the worship of *vata* tree on every Saturday of *Jaistha* (May-June). Usually womenfolk worship this tree for praying long life of their husbands. *Vata* tree is a symbol of longivity because of its aerial roots and long life.

In ancient Indian literature there is mention of the worship of *vata*. The poems of the poets, *Govardhana Acharya* of the 12th century can be referred in this regard :

Tvayi Kugrama Vatadruma Vaisravano
Vasatu Ba Lakshmi,
Pamara Kutharapatat
Kasarasirasaiva te raksha

It is clear from this couplet that *vata* was believed to be the symbol of Goddess *Lakshmi*, and God *Kuvera*.

It may be that the evergreen profuse leaves of the tree, abundance of fruits and the large growth of the tree have been symbolised with the deities, *Lakshmi* and *Kuvera*, for wealth and prosperity. The tree is also believed to be the symbol of the goddess *Sasthi*,

the goddess of fertility. The *vata* tree bear innumerable fruits, and, therefore, it is associated with the goddess. In the Chandimangala of Mukundarama, the poet of the 16th century, there is a reference of its association with the goddess *Sasthi* : *"Vata taru Kakhila Sasthir dham."*

Sasthi is the presiding deity of the children. Her annual worship is observed in *Jaistha* (May-June). A branch of the *vata* is planted to represent the goddess or a figure of the tree, bearing fruits in all its branches is painted on the wall and worshipped as the pictorial representation of the goddess. It is worshipped on the 21st day after the birth of a child in recognition of her care to the child and with the object of praying for her continued care.

The *amalaki* (*Phyllanthus emblica*) tree is associated with Shiva and Visnu. Though the worship of *amalaki* is not found widely in Bengal, there are traces of its worship somewhere on the *shivaratri* day. The tree is worshipped being surrounded by red and yellow thread. Flowers and fruits are offered to the tree. There is a reference in *Brihaddharma Purana* about the origin of the amalaki tree. In a sacred day goddess Parvati and Lakshmi, went to the sacred place, Prabhasa. Parvati said to Lakshmi that she had the intention to worship Visnu by a new material and Lakshmi also said to her that she had the same intention to worship Shiva. Then the *amalaki* tree was created by their tears. The leaves of *amalaki* are essential in worshiping Shiva and Visnu.

Kadali (*Musa sapientum*) or plantain plant is one of the *navapatrika* or the 'nine plants' which is the symbol of goddess Durga. In *Magha-mandala-vrata* by the womenfolk it is symbolised as the sun god. A plantain plant is ceremonially planted by the side of a small pond near the house, vermilion marks are smeared together with flowers and offerings. The main purpose of the ritual is to have a child or peaceful prosperous life or a husband.

Besides, this plant is sometimes represented as Durga. This plant is also a symbol of Lakshmi.

Rice or paddy (*Oryza sativa linn*) is the principal food in Bengal. To the Hindus, the goddess of wealth is Lakshmi and so paddy plant is identified with the goddess Lakshmi. The celebration of the worship of Lakshmi is observed on the fullmoon day following the Durga puja.

Again it is observed in the month of *Agrahayana* (Nov-Dec.) or *Magha* (Jan-Feb) and the ritual is repeated on every Thursday of these months. In many rural areas paddy stalks or even a basketful of unhusked paddy is represented as the goddess herself.

In the vrata ritual of *itu* the paddy plant is associated with the sun god.

On the days of Lakshmi *vrata* the womenfolk observing the ritual do not take rice or any rice preparations.

Paddy plant is also one of the 'nine plants' of the *Navapatrika.*

Durva (*Panicum dactylon*) grass is associated with Visnu. There is a mythical story about the origin of *durva.* In ancient times, Visnu caught hold of the hill *Mandara* by his arms and it was carried by him for the purpose of churning the occean by the gods and *asuras* on a sportive occasion. Due to its unusual weight Lord Visnu felt tired and at that time some hair follicles were removed from his body and dropped on the earth. These ultimately grew as *durva* grass. Durva is essential in every religious ceremony except the worship of Durga.

There is a *vrata* ritual called *Durvastami* in Bengal. It is observed on the 8th day of the brighter half of the moon in the month of *Bhadra* (Aug-Sep.). On that day *durva* is worshipped with offerings of fruits and flowers. The women are the chief participants. The long winded incantation of it depicts that the *durva* originated from the body of Visnu, hence it is symbol of Him. An interesting story associated with this ceremony runs thus :

Judhisthir once asked Krisna that by which *vrata* ritual the women do not lose their children. Krishna said to him that women would not lose their children if they observe the *durvastami vrata* ritual on the 8th day of the brighter half of the month of *Bhadra.* As *durva* is immortal in the world and it will never perish rather increase, the women would get children and the number would increase if they observe the *vrata.*

Tulsi (*Ocimum sanctum*) or the sacred basil is worship in Bengal. It is sacred to the *Vaisnavas.* According to *Brahmavaivarta Purana Tulsi* was a *gopika,* one of the beloved consorts of *Srikrishna.* Following a curse by *Radhika* she was born in the world as a *tulsi* plant. She gained the boon of Brahma who sincerely felt for her and bestowed an alternative suggestion in which she became wife of the demon Sankhachura and Visnu with a sympathy for her became stone as 'Salagrama Sila' as his own symbol.

In different vrata rituals *tulsi* is worshipped as the main deity having the power of bestowing wealth and good fortune. In *Kul-Kulati* vrata *tulsi* is identified with Jujube plant, a clan or family deity. Jujube leaves with other things are offered to the plant uttering *Chhadas* or recitations of poems. Offerings of lamps are given to *tulsi* plant and

it is identified with the deity of the *vrata* ritual, who has care for the family.

Bilva or the wood apple (Ægle marmelos) is also one of the sacred trees. There is a reference of its origin in *Brihaddharma Purana.* Lakshmi, used to worship Shiva every day regularly with 1000 lotuses. Accidentally, one day two lotuses were missing, hence she was faced with confronting problems of worship. Time of worship was approaching near and she did not find any alternatives. However she thought for a while that her beloved consort Visnu casually remarked her breasts as beautiful as the blooming lotuses. Then she offered those to Shiva by cutting with a sharp weapon. Actually, when she cut one of her breasts, Shiva appeared. He refrained her from doing this and said that He was very much satisfied with her devotion. But this detached breast was not placed on the ground and Shiva said that it would be wood apple and would be one of the sacred fruits in this world.

The *bilva* tree is associated with Shiva cult and sometimes identified with him also. *Shiva* would be pleased if the *bilva* tree be worshipped.

The *bilva* tree is also identified with Lakshmi. According to *Banhipurana,* Lakshmi came to the world as a sacred cow and from the cow dung originated the bilva tree. The bilva tree is called *Sribriksha,* the tree of prosperity and good fortune. According to *tantrik* sources also bilva tree is identified with Lakshmi. The legend goes thus : Visnu loved Saraswati more than Lakshmi. Lakshmi was engaged in sacred meditation for Shiva for a long time. In spite of her hard and earnest meditation she could not get any care from Shiva. After long time she became a tree and that tree was called *bilva* tree in the world. Shiva loves this tree very much and he dwells under it.

In folk belief this tree has other associations. The married women of the rural Bengal believe that the worship of *bilva* may give them the favour of their husbands. Therefore, they worship the tree with vermilion, sandalwood paste and flowers. Besides, the deities mentioned before, the tree is associated with other benevolent spirits.

In the *vrata* ritual of *itu-kumara* girls offer flowers and other articles under *bilva* tree for the deity, who is believed to reside in the tree. If the deity be pleased the girls would get themselves married in proper time to handsome and loving husbands. In mediaeval literature of Bengal there are references about the association of Shiva with the *bilva* tree also.

Manasa (*Euphobia lingularia*) tree is called *snuhi* tree in classical

litrerature and in Bengali it is called *manasa* or *Sija Manasa*. Manasa tree is identified with the goddess of the serpents. It is belived that on the 5th day of dark half of the moon in the month of *Sravana* (July-Aug.) the goddess Manasa appears in the tree with eight serpents having spreading hoods.

The manasa tree is planted on an altar of pyramidal shape in front of the dwelling house. Vermilion of pyramidal shape is applied on the trunk and leaves of the tree. Unboiled milk, plantain, sun-dried rice and other fruits are offered to her and later this consecrated food is distributed among the devotees. In the month of *asar* (June-July) in rainy season Manasa is also worshipped because in that season serpent abound in the locality.

In many places the manasa tree is also symbolised as a village godling *Ghantakarna,* when it is worshipped on the last day of the months of Chaitra (March-April) of the Bengali year.

There are *manasathan* or *manasatala* or sacred tabernacle dedicated to the name Manasa in many villages of Bengal. Sometimes small brick-built temple is found and somewhere a *manasa* tree is planted under open sky. The tree is worshipped daily in some villages. Usually the people worship the tree on the prescribed day. The tree is worshipped occasionally for one's fulfilment of vows. It is believed that the goddess Manasa can cure chronic and incurable deseases.

The goddess Manasa is also associated with fertility cult. The tree is worshipped occasionally by married women for the blessing of a child. A stone piece or brick is tied with a string by the side of the temple or the branches of the tree when the vow is taken. After its fulfilment the worship is done with pomp and grandeur. Goddess Manasa is accredited with occasional violent anger manifested in snake-bites and others.

There are series of literary works in the line termed as *Mangala Kavyas* in Bengali literature in which *manasamangala* is very important one, depicting the worship and her positive potentiality.

Jujube (*Zizyphus jujuba*) tree has got no place in Brahmanical rites. But the plant is used in folk rituals and vrata rites. The jujube tree has the spirit and it is identified with the deity. The deity is believed to be the benefactor and almost the guardian-spirit of the family. In *kul-kulati* vrata, the jujube plant is worshipped. The plant, then, is believed to be identified with the deity.

The ritual of *kul-kulati* vrata is observed from the first day of *Kartika* (Oct-Nov.) somewhere on the last day of *Asvina* (Sep.-Oct.).

Earthen lamps fed with oil are placed on the trunk in every evening. This vrata is observed by maidens for the welfare of the family to avert misfortunes and other calamities.

In *itu-kumara* vrata the plant is worshipped. *'Itu-Kumara'*, a godling is loved by unmarried girls as ideal husband. The girls ceremonially plant a branch of the jujube tree before celebration which is generally held in the month of *Falguna* (Feb.-March). They offer wild flowers, usually any sort of red fruits to the tree in every evening upto the last day of Falguna. On the last day the ceremonial immersion takes place.

The worship of Karma (*Adina cordifobia*) is in vogue in the western part of West Bengal and Chotanagpur plateau. *Karam* tree is usually worshipped by the Bhumij, the Mahatos, the Munda, the Oraon and such other tribal people. There are different tales about the origin of its worship. Long ago there lived two brothers named Dharma and Karma. Dharma was a businessman and earned much wealth. Karma was an agriculturist. He planted a *Karma* tree and worshipped it. One day Dharma was vexed because he was not properly treated by the brother as he was busy in worshripping the *karma* tree. Dharma became angry and threw away the plant. For this disregard to the plant Dharma faced great many sufferings. After a great trouble he at last worshipped the plant and thereby got back all his lost. In this way, the worship of the plant was established in the society. It is worshipped on the 11th day of the dark half of the moon in the month of Bhadra (Aug-Sept). On the previous day of the worship a feast is observed because the next day or the day of worship is a day of fast. An altar is made and washed by cowdung to sanctify it. They put lighted lamps and vermilion on the altar. A young man putting on new clothes observing fast goes to the forest to bring the God Karam from his abode. Others accompany him. He cuts off two branches of the Karma tree and comes back to the alter. The branches are placed with sacred rites on the alter. Then the worship begins with sacred materials uttering incantations. After the worship the priest tells the story of the origin of the world and the natural phenomena. When the ritual is over the people assembled dance together, sing, take food and make merry. These conclude the ritual aspect of the ceremony, people go with the branches of the tree for the immersion to the river or a tank.

The *Saora* (*Streblus asper*) is not a sacred tree. It is associated with so many beliefs and superstitions. The trees stated earlier are associated with benevolent deities, whereas Saora is associated with the ghosts and malignant spirits.

The Saora is also associated with *Vana-Durga,* the presiding deity of the forests which profusely grow in the villages of Bengal *

The tribal people of the western border of Bengal have a special regard for the *Sal* (*Sorea robusta*) tree. The Santal, the Lodha, the Munda and other tribal people of West Bengal worship the sal tree as the seat of gods. It is believed that the sal tree is the symbol of Indra. The tree is worshipped for general welfare, victory in battle, bumper crop and success in life. During the festival of *Indradhvaja* this tree is worshipped. The day for the worship of *Indradhvaja* is called the day of *"Satrutthan"*, meaning the erection of the pillar in some places. This ceremony was observed in ancient Bengal. There is a reference in a couplet written in the 12th century as under : "O Satrudhyaj, where are the businessmen who erected you and worshipped you, now the people like to use you as the handle of a plough or the post to tie the rope of cows". It is clear that the worship of *Indradhvaj* or the *Satrudhvaj* was in vogue before the 12th century.

The sal tree is worshipped on the 12th day of the brighter half of the moon in the month of Bhadra (July-Aug.). Before the day of worship two *sal* trees are marked in the forest. On the day of worship these two marked trees are cut and brought to the place of worship, planted side by side decorated with leaves, flowers and pieces of new cloth. A big umbrella made of bamboo and cloth is placed on the top of the trees. The trees are worshipped. Curd and puffed rice (*Khai*) are offered to the tree. The umbrella is called *Indrachhatra* or the umbrella of Indra.

This is not only a ritual or a religious ceremony, but it has its social significance. It continues for about a week, the people of the locality are invited to attend the ceremony and have a mass feast. They rejoice with music and dance. In mediaeval period, this ceremony was limited to the local chiefs and rich businessmen, but now-a-days this is also observed by the tribal people.

The worship of *sal* tree as the *Indradhvaj* or the symbol of Indra is prevalent in the western parts of Bengal which is now known as *Indradhvaj* or Ind-parab, (Ind being the distorted form of Indra). There are some barren fields in Bengal which are called as *Indkurir maidan,* the field of worship of Indra.

Though not very widely the worship of bamboo (*Bambusa arudinaea, Petz*) is also prevalent in Bengal. Bamboo is the symbol of

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* The article of Samir Ghosal may be referred to to obtain more informations on it. He wrote 'Saora' as *Sheora*.—Ed.

the *Vastu devata,* or the god of residential house and its surroundings. It is believed that this god presides over the dwelling house and takes care of the house.

The ceremonial worship of *Vastu devata* is observed usually once a year. If any mishaps occur the golding may be worshipped for several times in the belief that the godling has been displeased for some reasons and so the family is suffering. The scheduled day for the worship is the *Pous-samkranti,* the last day of the month of Pous (Dec-Jan).

On that day, a slender bamboo pole, with branches and leaves, is placed and purified by cowdung on the previous day. Decorations by rice-powder, turmeric powder, etc., are made on the ground around the pole. The pole is decorated with a piece of new cloth and anointed with vermilion. The articles needed for the worship are rice, turmeric, vermilion, sandalwood paste, flowers etc. Offerings are made of fruits, unboiled milk etc. It is believed that this worship will please *Vastu devata* and he will look after the general well-being of the family. This is in vogue in the eastern part of Bengal.

In the northern part of Bengal, bamboo is worshipped as village deity. The cults of these deities are still current. The folk deities are believed to be the caretakers of the agricultural fields, cottage industries and villages.

In *Gambhira* festival bamboo is worshipped too. It is called *Ahara-puja.* The upper portion of a bamboo or a branch of bamboo with leaves is placed near the *Gambhira.* The flowers of plantain, mangoes etc. are tied with it. Then is it worshipped and offerings are made to it.

Since a long time the goddess Durga is worshipped in the autumn called *Saradiya Puja* or the worship in autumn. The goddess Durga is worshipped having the image of clay with other gods and goddesses but there is a rite of worship of *Navapatrika* or "the worship of Nine Plants', which has been described by different scholars in a variety of way.

It is stated that the goddess Durga established peace in the world being rambha or kadali. Therefore, *kadali* is one of the nine plants. The goddess of the plant is *Brahmani.* The goddess Durga took the image of *Kachu* at the time of fighting against *Mahisaśura.* Therefore, it is the second plant in the collection. The goddess of this plant is Kalika. The goddess Durga took the image of 'haridra' when she was Uma. Hence 'haridra' regarded as the third plant. The goddess of this plant is Durga. Jayanti was worshipped at the time fighting against Sumbha

and Nisumbha. It is the fourth plant. The goddess of this plant is *Kartika.* The bilva or the wood-apple tree is loved very much by Shiva, as rambha or kadali. Therefore, *kadali* is also one of the nine plant. The goddess of this tree is *Sibani.* Darimba helped Durga against the demon *Raktabija,* therefore it is the sixth plant. The goddess of this tree is *Raktadantika.* Asoka tree is loved by Shiva and it is considered *Shokenasak,* therefore, it is the seventh plant. Durga was in the leaves of mana, therefore, it is the eighth plant. Brahma created the paddy plant for supplying the major food for the people, therefore, it is the ninth plant. The goddess of this plant is *Lakshmi.*

The individual goddess of these nine plants are associated with Durga. * The Navapatrika is also called the Nava Durga or Navapatrika-vasini Durga. It is accepted that the individual trees or plants are the dwelling places of individual goddesses with different names, but the nine plants together or the navapatrika is believed to be the embodiment of the goddess Durga. The goddess Durga is also called *Sakambhari,* the *'herb-bearing'* or 'herb-nourishing', because she is believed to be the mother of the earth with the life-sustaining vegetables grown on the earth.

III

The second stage of the tree symbol worship may be considered in the association of deities with the trees and the sacred trees. At this stage individual trees are not believed to be the abode or dwelling places of the deities. Some of the trees may be the representatives of some deities but individual trees are not associated with individual deities anyway.

There are certain trees, plants, flowers leaves and roots which have their association with certain deities. The worship of a particular deity is observed by particular leaves, flowers peculiar to it. The *dhutura* (*Datura Stramoniur*) and *akanda* (*Asclepias gigantia*) plants and flowers are loved by Shiva.

Number of "Vrata" rituals and occasional local worships are observed by the womenfolk and children in which a good number of local deities are worshipped having their representations in plants, branches of trees etc. Many of the local deities have no idol or image

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* The article of Sibnarayan Kabiraj may be referred to for further details in this respect. The contributor of this article has described the relation of each of the nine plants with nine goddesses individually while all the nine plants together represent the goddess Durga.—Ed.

but are worshipped with the symbolical representation as plants. The worship of the goddessling *"Pasan Chandi"* is held in the month of *Agrahayana.* (Nov.-Dec.). A *bena* bush is uprooted and planted in the inner portion of the dwelling house.

The 'than' or *tala* of benevolent folk deities in Bengal are placed in the vicinity of the villages and the malignant ones are placed outside the village or outskirt of the villages and near the burning ghat. The deities are worshipped on the scheduled days of the year or occasionally according to the custom of the local people. The presiding deities of epidemics like pox, cholera and other variants are worshipped usually on the outbreak of these.

Some plants, fruits, flowers, roots are considered sacred as they are essential materials in observing the *vrata* rituals. The paddy, turmeric, and *mankachu* are necessary in *Itu puja vrata.* In *Maghamandal vrata* the plantain plant, sugar-cane plant and bamboo branch with leaves are necessary. In *Itukumar vrata, drona* plant (Erythine indica), *palasa* (Butea frondosa), paddy, *durva* grass etc. are used. To observe this *vrata* rite the *kadam* tree (Anthocephalus *cadamba*) or *neem* tree(*Azadichta indica*) or *bilva* tree (*Aegle Marmelos*) *mankachu* etc. are also needed as has been said earlier.

The mango trees (Mangifera indica) are considered sacred almost in each religious ceremony, rites and rituals. The branches of the tree (*Amrapallab*) is used in the *ghata* (a water filled earthen jug with sacred articles) which is the physical representation of the gods or goddesses worshipped. A Mango grove is believed to be the residence of benevolent spirits.

The coconut tree (*Cocos nucifera*) is also belived to be sacred. The green coconut is an essential article for *ghata.* Coconuts are required in worship of some deities.

Betelnuts are considered as sacred as coconuts. It has some association with the goddess Lakshmi. Somewhere a green betelnut on a basketful of paddy is considered to be the image of Lakshmi. Betel-leaf is also believed to be sacred in Bengal. *Ginger* (Zingiber officinale) is used in some religious ceremonies and rituals.

The idea of folk gods are shadowy and obscure. There is no philosophical background behind the imagination of the pantheon. Tribal godling *Bonga* with his different forms is worshipped under the *sal tree*, so *sal tree* is considered as the symbol of this deity. The godling *Baram* may be worshipped under any tree. The goddessling *Rankini* is worshipped usually under *asvattha* and *vata.* Trees are

associated in the worship of the goddling *Kudra* and *Sini*. They are worshipped widely in West Bengal, particularly in the tribal belt. Besides, there are *Manasa, Bhairab, Bhirabi, Dharma,* and many other deities. Some of them are believed to be the gods or goddesses of the forest. These deities have no shrine or temple, they are kept under the trees in open. The building of shrine or temple for them is forbidden according to religious belief.

In northern part of Bengal it is believed that the goddess *Kali* had eighteen sons. The eldest *Masan* was not tall and he possessed long beard. He was born in the month of *Bhadra*. After his birth his hair was thrown in to a river which transformed into *Kalmi Sak,* an aquatic creeper. This creeper is a popular vegetable food. In northern Bengal this is not taken by the Hindus in the month of *Bhadra,* because of its association with *Masan*. It is believed that—

Bhadra mase kalmi sak je ba jane khay
Masaner madi se abasya chabay.

The worship of *Masan* is observed twice a year. *Jaherthan* is believed to be the residence of principal deities in the tribal villages. *Jaherthan* is the cluster of trees. It is essential that residence of deities include five trees, four *sal* and one *mahua*. A stone-piece for each deity is placed at the foot of each tree. The individual trees are meant for individual deities.

In November-December when the harvesting is over, a bunch of paddy plants is worshipped. On an auspicious day food from the rice of new paddy is prepared and offered to the ancesters and then is taken by the members of the family. This worship is called Khanda worship (harvest and other agricultural food products).

Panchanan and *Khetrapal* are village godlings. These godlings are worshipped in the western part of Bengal. There is no image of these deities. Any tree may be their symbol, *vata, bilva, asvattha, seora* etc.

There are many village deities worshipped in rural Bengal. They are *Basali, Kali, Chandi, Manasa, Rankini*. Usually these deities have no definite image to worship. Stone slabs or burnt clay horses and elephants under tree symbolise the deities, somewhere trees symbolise the deities and burnt clay horses and elephants are offered to them. These deities preside over the village and look after the welfare of the people.

Another group of deities are there. They preside over pox, cholera and other epidemics *Sitala, Olabibi* can be named in this group. Trees are the symbol of these deities, and are worshipped.

There are number of deities in southern Bengal, particularly in the *Sundarban* area. *Dakshin Ray, Barakhan Gazj, Bana Bibi, Bana Durga, Pir* and the other deities are also the deities of the forests. These deities are worshipped before going to the forest and worshipped after safe return from the forest as a mark of gratitude. Somewhere they have traditional images but mostly they are worshipped under certain trees which are the symbols of these deities. No particular tree is assigned as their symbol.

In different parts of West Bengal local people assemble, fix a date and on that day a tree is worshipp. Offerings of fruits and flowers are given, somewhere animals are also sacrificed. Some of these trees are cult of Dharma is widely prevalent in West Bengal. On the 10th day of the 12-day worship of *Dharma thakura* the *Gambhari* tree is worbelieved to be the abode of certain spirit, nenevolent or malignant. The shipped which is cut and brought to the place of the worship of Dharma. It is bathed. Oil, turmeric base, sandalwood paste are anointed to the tree. The tree with leaves and flowers is the symbol of *Dharma thakura* himself.

The third stage of belief and superstition associated with tree-symbol worship may be traced to the sacred plantation. The belief of animism pervades all over the world and the belief is there with vegetable spirits. Some trees are worshipped for the association of certain deities and some deities are worshipped under certain trees. There are the direct proofs of the association of deities with the trees.

There are trees which are not believed as the symbols. The plantation of the *asvattha* and the *vata tree* is a sacred one by the side of the road. Though these trees are not always worshipped still these are considered to be sacred. These trees are planted for service to humanity. The people walking on the road or passers-by may take shelter under these and keep them off from the scorching sun. The sacred plantation of these two trees is associated with religious belief. They are planted individually or side by side. There is a ritual of marriage between the two trees after sacred plantation.

Besides these two trees, there are other trees like *bilva* tree, *amlaki, asoka* and others. They are planted within the jurisdiction of the dwelling house, particularly by the side of the shrine of the house deity. Sacred trees are also planted near the temple of public religious cerenomies and near the shrine of the village deities and other places considered sacred. Usually womenfolk and elderly religious minded peo-

ple offer water at the foot of the trees after taking their bath and utter incantation at the time of offering water.

In Bengal, the sacred grove is called the *Panchavati* or the five trees. In the idea of *navaptrika* or the 'nine-plants', the spirits of individual plants merged into one and the spirit of nine plants is worshipped as one deity. Like the *navapatrika* the individual spirit of each tree is merged into one as *panchavati* and 'five trees' or the sacred grove is considered as of one spirit. It is considered to be the proper place for *dhyana* or sacred meditation for self-realisation. The literal meaning of *panchavati* is five *vata* (tree). But *panchavati* does not mean so. It means five scheduled trees which are mentioned in the scriptures.

There is direction in respect of its plantation. The *asvattha* tree should be situated in the eastern side, *bilva* tree in the north, *Vata* in the west, *amalaki* in the south and *asoka* in the south-east corner.

IV

Each of the above-mentioned three stages is not isolated one, they are rather interrelated. Not all the trees are worshipped in the whole of the geographical area of Bengal. The worship of all the gods and goddesses is not prevalent in the whole of the area. Worships of some trees and deities are localised, worship of some trees and deities are regional, but as a whole the beliefs, superstition, ideas, philosophical interpretations are working at the background of the religious mind of the people.

There are two different religious thoughts among the Hindus of Bengal. One is the Brahmanical philosophy and the other is regional folk-religious ideas.

The population of Bengal is of mixed nature. The religious ideas of different blood-groups have influenced each other. Interrelation can be traced among the different religious ideas. Superimposition of thoughts have been made through centuries. Diffusion of religious traits are also traceable in these methods of worship.

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APPENDIX

Appendix (i) and (ii) are incorporated with a view to place before a reader a total picture of Tree in a single volume. Some of the points discussed earlier might have been repeated here, still we have ventured to accommodate them here in the hope that the general readers will benefit from them getting some facts in one place. A note on Appendix by the contributor himself (iii) is there, which speaks for itself.—Ed.

Appendix I

P. Thankappan Nair

TREE MARRIAGE IN INDIA

There was wide currency of mock marriages in India. The objects selected for mock marriages varied from a small arrow to a giant tree. In this article we shall confine ourselves to mock marriages to trees, plants and flowers.

Tree-marriage is a particular rite practised by some of the aboriginal as well as civilized communities of India as a prologue to a real marriage. Marriage implies union of one man with a woman, or women or *vice-versa* in tribal societies, with the intention of procreation of children. If there is no such intention, there can, in fact, be no marriage. Mere association for the sake of discharging sexual urge is not worth the appellation of marriage. When a person marries he or she undertakes the responsibility of providing consortium. Marriage does not take place if the parties are not creating some kind of an obligation. Prevalence of divorce does not, of itself, show that no obligation is created. Divorce is an implied right of the parties to unget themselves from the obligation they have created for themselves.

The term 'tree-marriage' is used here to indicate a marriage in which some of the essential elements of a real marriage are lacking. As we have stated, there should be two human beings of opposite sex to a marriage who unite themselves primarily for sexual partnership. Such being the implication, if one of the parties is an inanimate object or a botanical specimen , there is no marriage in the actual sense of the word, but something that outwardly resembling a marriage ceremony. Plants and trees that thrive with Nature's bounty cannot perform the marital duties that appertain to human species. Tree-marriages do not create any *vinculum juris* which is essential in a contractual obligation. Consequently, one who has performed a tree-marriage cannot go in for divorce. He is not called upon to perform the marital duties.

Origin of Tree-marriage

The origin of tree-marriage is as obscure as its development. We hopelessly fail to understand the motive behind such a *pro forma* mar-

riage among the tribal population of India. If we label tree-marriage as some freakishness of the primitive mind we are rather committing the fallacy of over-simplification of its significance, and dismissal of such a practice as due to mere superstitious beliefs of the indigenous people leads us to the *cul-de-sac* of under-estimating. Anthropologists and sociologists tend to label such practices as manifestations of Sympathetic Magic. The theorists will probably hold that such practices are meant for avoiding the visitations of catastrophes that may befall on the parties during their married life, and by marrying a botanical specimen a scapegot is found out to shoulder the burden of such future misfortunes. The primitive man may laugh at such 'discoveries' of his civilized brethren. Psychological interpretation and its *raison d'etre* have not been attempted yet and, as such, we should try to find out a clue in the pantheistic conception of the primitive man. He may be performing the rite simply to pay his respect to such an object that saves him from the scorching sun and the relentless rains. In fact if a member of the cotton-ginning caste is first of all married to a *rui* (silk cotton) tree, it will simply be a way to show some kind of respect to the tree which gives him his bread. It may mean also that he is not giving up his profession of ginning cotton, though he incurs obligations in marriage, but is not seeking divorce of his calling. He may divorce his wife or get a decree for a judicial separation from a civil court, but to seek divorce of his profession is unthinkable to him. He may get many a bride, but he cannot think of taking recourse to any tree than a *rui*, for from time immemorial that tree provided him with his means of livelihood.

The marriage of bachelors to such plants and trees as *rui, shami* bush, jujube, etc. might originally have been connected with the particular profession practised by the tribes which they have had to change due to competition or reasons beyond their control. Perpetuation of the practice is therefore a natural outcome, though the significance and continuance of such customs are often shrouded, and their sentimental value is diminishing.

The motive behind tree-marriages

The motive behind a marriage with a tree or plant which a bachelor, who wishes to espouse a widow, has to go through may be quite different. Marriage is an original mode of acqusition of property in the person of the bride and reconveyance of the same is impossible in the absence of the original owner. When a widow is married, she should still be held as the property of her late husband and no act of third parties can transfer her, in the absence of her late husband, who had

acquired her either by serving or paying for her. When the property is acquired by a group of persons, death of any one of them will automatically vest the property in the surviving persons. Consequently, the widow is required to marry to render services for those who have paid for her, no matter that the particular person to whom she was married to has expired. As the surviving persons are the legal owners, and reconveyance has not taken place, her services only can be lent to a third party. Approbation of the society is required even for such a temporary transfer and a mock marriage with a tree, plant or flower should be gone through to validate such a transaction.

The hypotheses suggested in these lines require testing, but human species are not susceptible of such tests. So we shall be content with citing a few examples in support of our point of view.

Most of the tribal marriages were, and are still, adult, and we cannot vouchsafe the argument that there is a social stigma if a girl attains puberty without being married, as is the case with the more Hinduised tribes of India. Infant marriages were invented possibly by Brahmans in order to counteract the premarital sexual licence that prevails among the tribal population of India. No value is attached to chastity, a virtue opposed to Nature's conception of sexual union. Fornication is likely to result in conception and a parturition without a recognised percentage is intolerable to our civilized society. Notification of the flow of the first menstrual blood is required to be made among some of the communities of India and if the girl is not disposed of in marriage before attaining puberty, the community at large will come to know of such irregularities. To avoid such social ostracism, the girl is married to some objects in some of the communities in India

Fake marriages are also gone through in order to proclaim that a girl is of marriageable age and suitors may try their hands according to the whims and fancies of the lady. To facilitate regular marriage among suitors, fake marriage to tree or other objects is a prologue in which she goes through a *pro forma* marriage ceremony. In this case it is not borne out of any social stigma.

Primitive people may also resort to fake marriages with trees, plants, flowers etc. in order to ward off the spirits and evil-eye. Evil-eye is dreaded by the primitive man and even we notice a pot with a hideous face drawn on it is the kitchen or vegetable gardens raised on riparian alluvium. Performance of sham marriages to dispel jettatura is good if its efficacy is not questioned. We fail to give any scientific proof of the efficacy of jettatura here.

Marriage of bachelors to widows

Among some of the tribes of the Bombay Presidency, bachelors are required to go through a mock marriage to a botanical specimen before he goes through the actual marriage ceremony. Some of the tribes actually discourage marriage of bachelors to widows. The reason advanced for the mock marriage ceremony with a *shami* bush or *rui* tree is that it is meant for warding off the spirit of the dead husband. The machinations of the evil spirit of her late husband may bring disaster to the new husband and the evil dispositions of the late husband can be transferred to a scapegoat such as a tree or plant. A second marriage of a woman is supposed to bring misfortune, but a third one is not. To our mind, there is no reason why the spirit of the late husband should not cause injury to the person who tries to seduce his spouse. If the people believe that the spirit is active and his machinations will bring real harm, no amount of deception practised on him by a mock marriage will be efficacious or bring an appeasement.

The real reason seems to be quite different. A widow, according to the primitive mind, is still the property of her late husband and she cannot be appropriated by marriage. Only her services can be obtained, for she is destined to rejoin her husband in the nether world. A widow whose misfortune has brought about the death of her husband is looked down upon by the primitive society and by marrying her a man is inviting trouble to him. If he simply lives with her there can be no misfortune, for he is not acquiring her. The real marriage ceremony takes place to a *rui* bush or similar object and the widow is simply hired for her services. We reserve a discussion on the notions entertained by the aboriginal peoples of India in respect of widow marriage to another part of this essay.

In concluding this part of this article we should remind ourselves that it is high time that we give up interpretation of obscure tribal customs in terms of magic. We should rather try to analyse them according to their psychological meaning. With these preliminary remarks, we shall cite a few examples of tribes who used to practise tree-marriages. An exhaustive survey of the practice is outside the scope of this short article.

Eastern India

The institution of adult marriage has discouraged mock marriages of any kind in Assam. Further, payment for the bride establishes the claims of the relatives of the deceased to retain her in service.

Consequently, tree-marriage or other such mock-marriages are not found among the tribal population of Assam.

We have evidence of the practice of tree-marriages among some of the primitive people of Bengal. The Kurmi[1] bridegroom of Chotanagpur is required to undergo a marriage ceremony with a mango tree. Not only he embraces it, but he is tied to it with a thread and just as in a real marriage the vermillion is applied to the forehead of the bride, the tree is daubed with it. The bride is similarly taken to a *Mahua* (*Bassia latifolia*) tree and she has to marry it as a counterpart of the bridegroom's marriage to the mango tree. The Mundas[2] also have similar customs. A Munda bride is married to a *Mahua* tree and the bridegroom to a mango tree, or both to mango trees, and *sindur* is daubed on the tree. Before a Bagdi[3] starts in his marriage procession he is to be married to a *Mahua* tree and bedaubs it with vermillion. The *Mahua* tree is the scapegoat for Karwards[4] also. Among the Mahilis[5] of the same locality, the bridegroom marries a mango tree and the bride a *Muhua* tree before the actual marriage. The Newar[6] girls of Nepal are married to *bel* fruits in their childhood, the fruit being thrown into any sacred river. A Chasa[7] girl may be married to an arrow with some *kush* grass, which she worships as her real husband. In a subsequent marriage she is married as a widow to which the bridegroom need not present himself, but may depute a proxy.

Western India

Mock marriages with trees etc. was a necessity among some of the highly civilized primitive communities of India among whom real marriage ceremony used to be conducted only once at regular intervals. Thus, among the Kedara Kumbis, girls are married only once in twelve years. In order to avoid such long periods, girls are married to flowers which may be afterwards thrown into wells.

Among most of the tribes of Western India bachelors espousing widows must marry some animate or inanimate objects before the actual marriage ceremony. Thus, *shami* (*Prosopis Spicigera*) trees are married by the Bagdis, Bharmtas, Bhandaries, Chambars, Dhodias, Dublas, Golas, Holayas, Jingars, Kaikadis, Machhis, Managals, Ravals, Sindhavas, Tambolis, Tingars etc. as a preliminary to bachelor-widow union.[8]

Rui (*Calotropis gigantea*) plant or some other trees are preferred by the Barrias, Bistis, Bhois, Buruds, Chodras, Devangas, Dhangars, Dhors, Gopalas, Kolhatis, Maratha Kumbhis, Mahar, Sudirs, Telis,

Thakurs etc. as the object of mock marriage. We are not sure if a widower is to go through similar ceremonies when he marries a virgin.[9]

Central India

Bachelors among some of the aboriginal tribes of Central India are required to be votaries of mock-marriages before espousing widows. Thus, a Tiyar bachelor may marry a bunch of flowers before he weds a widow, a Bharbhunja a stick, a Kaikari a ring or *akao* plant, a Kotia a cotton plant, a Kunbi an *arka* or swallow-wort plant, a Mali any tree he likes.[10]

The Kol bridegroom is made a widower before he marries a widow so that he should not out-weigh in the social scale. The Panch arranges the mock-wedding for the bachelor-bridegroom when he seeks connubial relations with a widow. Mock marriage among them takes several forms like circumambulation for seven times around a silver or gold ring tied to a *magrohan* stick bedaubed with *sindur*. Immediately after the mock marriage he is annointed with sweet oil mixed with turmeric to signify that his wife (the ring) is dead and as he is now a widower, he can marry a widow.[11]

Northern India

Among the Baurias, if a blind or one-eyed man must marry a blind or one-eyed woman, we should not make haste to generalize that a widwoer must marry a widow only. The Hindus of Panjab are allowed to marry for a fourth time, but there is prohibition to a third time. Hence the bridegroom is required to be married to a *Babul* tree, or an *Akh* plant on the third instance, so that the lady becomes his fourth wife.[12]

Conclusion

Instances of mock marriages to flowers, plants, sticks, trees etc. are not lacking in India. The motive behind it is not certain, though it is supposed to ward off evil spirits. Caution must be exercised in accepting such a theory. Primitive people are primarily wedded to their callings and marriage detracts them. Hence it is in the fitness of things that they must marry their objects of callings.

When a bachelor marries a widow, the actual marriage ceremony is

performed on some animate or inanimate object with a view to utilizing her services as a kept-woman, for actually she belongs to her late husband and she is incapable of being permanently annexed, as can be done in a ceremonial marriage.

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Appendix II

Sibnarayan Kabiraj

FERTILITY CULT AND TREES

The conception of tree as the symbol of fertility seems to be clearly emphasised in the Assyrian cylinders and bas-reliefs, where it is conventionally represented as date-palm between two personages, who approach it from either side bearing in their hands a cone similar to the inflorescence of the male date-palm. The ancient people had connected in their minds the idea of fertility cult with sex and had viewed trees likewise. Indeed, the sexual aspect was highly complicated ; and this does not seem to have been only one-sided. It appears that there was certain idea of mutual benefit, in obedience to which naked men and women would go into certain plantation at the night by a sort of sexual intercourse to fertilise them.

The tree was a most intimate presence to man. "It grew in the very midst of the Garden of Eden. It had a magical virtue which his tentative science could only explain by chance analogies and assimilation. Attractive and beloved and worshipped by reason of its many gifts to mankind—its grateful shelter, its abounding fruit, its timber and other valuable products—why should it not become the natural emblem of the female, to whom through sex man's worship is ever drawn ? If the snake has an unmistakable resemblances to the male organ in its active state, the foliage of tree or bush is equally remindful of female. What is more clear than that the conjunction of Tree and Serpent is the fulfilment in nature of sex-mystery which is so potent in the life of man and animal ? And that the magic ritual most obviously fitted to induce fertility in the tribes or the herds (or even the crops) is to set up an image of the Tree and Serpent combined, and for all tribal-folk in common to worship and pay it reverence. In the Bible with more or less veiled sexual significance we have this combination in the Eden-Garden and again the brazen serpent and pole which Moses set in the wildnerness."[1] It would be a fascinating task to make some random reflections on the fertility cult connected with trees. It is well-known that "in the olden times, the Malaya Pawangs or magicians used to perform a curious ceremony for the purpose of coaxing the barren durian tree into bearing fruit. This ceremony runs thus :

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1. Pagan and Christian creeds by Edward Carpenter, p. 97.

"On a specially selected day, a Pawang would burn incense and scatter rice. Then singling out the most barren of the durian trees, he would take a hatchet, and by means of it, strike several blows at this tree, to the accompaniment of the utterance of the following words :—

'Will you now bear fruit or not ?
If you do not I shall fell you.'

In reply to this quary, the tree (through the mouth of a man who had been stationed for this purpose upon a neighbouring tree) is supposed to make the following response :—

'Yes, I will now bear fruit
I beg you not to fell me'."[2]

This rite is also found in Transylvania and is found in Hungary, Central Australia, Japan, South Slavonia, Bulgaria and other places with the same object in view but slight local adaptation may occur in the practices such as in some places the people come and serve blow first on the trunk of the barren tree, saying "Will you now bear fruit. . . . ." etc. and the reply comes through the mouth of another man who had climbed the tree like above. Sometimes they beat the tree with an iron rod. This rod is considered as the genital organ and the beating as intercourse.

The Malays believe that the trees, from which *gutta percha* is extracted, are also the abode of a spirit which is less dangerous than either the eagle-wood spirit or the camphor spirit. It is for this reason that the Malay medicine-men have to take fewer precautions when dealing with this spirit. In the undermentioned invocation addressed to the *gutta percha* spirit, the collectors of *gutta-percha* pray for a drop of the spirit's blood. This is, of course, an indirect way of expressing the desire to take the sap of the gutta tree :

"Ho, Prince, S'ri Bali
Prince S'ri Bandang."[3]

(I wish to crave the boon of a drop of blood. May the yield be better than this notch of mine.)

After uttering the foregoing prayer-formula, the collector of *gutta-*

2. On the cult of tree goddess in Eastern Bengal by S. C. Mitra, *Man-in-India* Vol. II, 1922.
3. Ibid.

percha notches the gutta tree. Then he utters the following threat in order to coerce the tree into yielding a better supply.

"If it be not better,
You shall be a rebel unto God."

The same belief is in existence in Bengal where the belief of a spirit which dwells in trees and plants is prevalent. It also prevailed in ancient India, inasmuch as the goddess Durga was looked upon as the light of a vegetation-spirit or corn-mother. This will be evident from the fact that in the *Devi Mahatmya* (92, 43-44) the goddess is made to say :—

"Next O ye gods, I shall nourish (lit, support) whole world with the life-sustaining vegetables which shall grow out of my own body during a period of heavy rain. I shall gain fame on the earth then as *Sakambhari.*'[4]

After separately offering up prayers to all the nine plants and personifications of the vegetation-spirit or the tree-goodess, the worshipper concludes the worship by saying the following further prayer :-

"Om O leaf (Patrika) ; O nine forms of Durga ! You are the darling of Mahadeva, accept all these offerings and protect me. O queen of Heaven Om, adoration to Durga dewing the nine plants."

Next turn to *Vengai* flower which is so popular in South India.

Vengai flower has an unfailing signal for the performance of impending marriage. During the flowering period ladies in love of South India "would sent their maids to their lovers to expedite their marriage and there are a number of instances to prove this custom. Thus when marriages were performed during the flowering season of the *Vengai* tree, brides would adorn themselves with garlands of *Vengai* flowers. The wearing of *Vengai* flower by girl was a sure sign that she had been newly married. Girls about to be married, would be anxiously waiting for the day when they could wear the scented *Vengai* flowers ; and young lovers would console their beloved fiancees by promising to solemnise their unions by the sacred wed-lock during the flowering season of *Vengai* .... Even marriage negotiations were carried on under the shade of a *Vengai* tree when both the parties would sit and discuss the terms of the marriage." .... So this tree was

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4. In the Introduction of the book "Rain in Indian life and lore" ed. by Sankar Sen Gupta more details about *Sakambhari* appeared in p. 14. Acharya Jogeshchandra Ray Vidyanidhi had a different theory of his own which he described in his Bengali book '*Puja-Parban*', Calcutta, 1358 B. S.

also called *'Mandral Vengai'* or Marriage Tree or Tree of Marriage.[5]

The *Vengai* has got its Pauranic importance. The popular story of Valli's wedding to Lord Muruga is widely known. It is said that Lord Muruga transformed himself into a *Vengai* tree in the midst of his love dalliance with Valli when the father and brothers of the latter approached the spot by surprise.

In this connection an interesting point on 'Siva Linga' may be raised which, according G. Subramanian Pillai,[6] has certain significance in relation to tree. He describes as under :

"The original name for *Siva Linga* in Tamil was *Kanthali*. *Kanthali* has been described as the Supreme Divine Essence that transcends all form, shape, attachment and affection, and is sustained by itself. It is the Supreme Primal Deity of the Tamils, viz., Siva..... He is called *Maluval Nediyon* in *Madurai-Kanchi*. So Siva was called *Kanthali*, as transcending all forms. ..... *Kanthali* consists two words, 'Kanthu' and 'Ali'. We know what a *Kantha* is. It means the stump of a tree. .... This wooden stump was called 'Kanthu' and its worship *Kanthudeinilai*. But when wooden stump also cannot be proof against the ravages of time and would soon wear out and vanish, when it thus disappeared in course of time, a stone post or pillar was installed in its place and worship in memory of the former *Kanthali* was offered. This stone was called *'Kanthali'*—'Ali' in Tamil means 'to destroy' and *Kanthali* means the success or substitute. . . . This substitute stone post later took the form of *Siva Linga*. ..... Later, in course of time, convenience and the mode of worship consisting of several holy ablutions, necessitated a groove or canal to be dug round and the circular base to receive the holy water and pass it on to the side of the receptable specially built for the purpose in a part of the shrine ..... This is the only plausible interpretation of the origin of the cult of Linga worship ; for even the remotest idea of Phallism is revolting to the fine and cultured sensibilities of Dravidian race.[7]

Let us remember here that some scholars opine that the *Linga Worship* is a corrupt of Buddhit's *Stupa Worship*. Interested readers are recommended to read "Elements of Hindu Iconography" and other publications to know details about origin and development of Linga Worship in India.

In this connection another important point may be cited. We know

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5. An article on "The Tree marriage in India" appeared in Appendix i.—Ed.
6. Tree Worship and Oplilatory by G. Subramania Pillai, Annamalai Univ., 1948.
7. Ibid.

Devi Durga as *Sakambhari.* She described her identification in the *Devi Mahatmya* as under :

ततोहमखिलं लोकमात्मदेहसमुद्भवैः ।
भरिष्यामि सुराः शाकैरावृष्टेः प्राणधारकैः ॥
शाकम्भरीति विख्यातिं तदा यास्यामहं । भुमि (मार्कन्डेय)

This self-introduction of Devi herself speaks of her direct relation with tree and that of fertility. There are some more archaeological evidences which also signify the same idea. For example, we may refer the female terracotta figurine which is nude and turn upside down.[8] From her source a climbing plant is coming out upwards. The arms of this figurine, excavated from Harappa, are expanded in a manner of *Adi Siva,* discovered from the Mahenjo-Daro. Another figurine excavated by John Marshall from the Vita excavation speaks of the same idea. Both the legs and hands of this figurine is spread out. But instead of a creeping plant proceeded from the birth, a lotus with stem issued from her neck. All these are the symbols of production hence have the relation with fertility.

Sir James Frazer who describes that in "Moluccas, when the clove-trees are in blossom, they are treated like pregnant women. No noise may be made near them, no light or fire may be carried past them at night ; no one may approach them with his hat on, all must uncover in their presence. . . . Thus in Amboyna, when the rice is in bloom, the people say, it is pregnant and fire no guns and make no other noise near the field lest, if the rice were thus disturbed, it would, miscarry, and the crop would be all straw and no grain".[9]

And from this conviction "the Pipiles tribe of Central America kept apart from their wives in order that on the night before planting they might indulge their passions to the fullest extent ; certain persons are even said to have been appointed to perform the sexual act at the very moment when the first seeds were deposited in the ground".[10] There are even agriculturists who used "to use their wives at that time which was indeed enjoined upon the people by the priests as a religious duty, in default of which it was not lawful to sow the seed".*

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8. *Panchopasana* by Jitendranath Bandyopadhyay, Calcutta, 1962.
9. The Golden Bough, Abridged Edition by J. Frazer, p. 115.
10. Ibid, 136.

* For point of information it can be said that the idea of sex and fertility manifest in T. S. Elliot's *Ash Wednesday* and *The Waste Land* are taken from Sri J. G. Frazer's 'The Golden Bough'.. Elliot's "You must not deny the body" manifest a forcible perennial idea.

In some parts of Java at the season when the bloom will soon be on the rice, the husbandman and his wife visit their fields by night and then engage in sexual intercourse.

Bagandas of Central Africa so strongly believe "in the intimate relation between the intercourse of sexes with the fertility of the ground that among them a barren wife is sent away, because she is supposed to prevent her husband's garden from bearing fruit".[11] On the contrary, a couple who have given proof of extraordinary fertility by becoming the parents of twins are believed by the Baganda to be endowed with a corresponding power of increasing fruitfulness of plantain trees, which furnish them with their staple food. After the birth of a twin the following ceremony is performed : The mother lies down on her back on the thick grass near the house and places a flower of plantain between her legs. Then her husband comes and 'knocks the flower away with his genital member.[12] It is also not uncommon among the Indian peasants that during the sowing time the husbands are not allowed to sleep with their wives. Then there are beliefs "in Leti, Sarmata, and some other groups of islands which lie between the western end of New Guinea and the northern part of Australia, the heathen population regard the sun as male principle by whom the earth or female principle is fertilised. They call him Upa-lera or Mr. Sun, and represent him under the form of a lamp made of coconut leaves which may be seen hanging everywhere in their houses and in the sacred fig tree."[13]

Trees therefore were believed to exercise considerable influence upon marriage with respect to both fertility and happiness. The marriage of trees was frequently celebrated and when they were in blossom they were treated as pregnant women so that no noise was made near them. Belief goes that if a Hindu had planted a *mango* tree, he could not eat its fruit until he had married it to some other tree, perhaps, a *tamarind*. Kalidasa has mentioned the marriage of *Navamallika* flower with a mango tree (*Kalpabriksha*). The pumpkin is regarded as a symbol of son, hence no women having no male issue, can dare cut it into pieces. The boys of the household are asked to break it first and only then the housewife can touch it. On the Christmas Eve German peasants use to tie fruit trees together with straw ropes to make them bear fruit, saying that the trees were thus married.

The underlying belief in tree as promoter of fertility led to many curious practices. Krishna's marriage to the basil plant, that holder of

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11. The Golden Bough, p. 137.
12. Ibid, p. 137.
13. Ibid, p. 136.

the essence of Vishnu, is celebrated to the present day and it is prevalent among some tribal people in India to go through a marriage ceremony of two trees. And after marriage, trees were entrusted to ensure the bearing of children. It is very interesting to trace the origin of *Tulsi*-Krishna marriage from a mythology :

It is stated in *Padma Purana* * that 'Indra went to look for Siva in Kailas, his abode. Siva was so wrathful that Brihaspati, the priest of the gods, had to intercede with him for Indra's life. The lightning sent by Siva to kill Indra fell into the sea at the confluence of the Ganga. "Of the union of that lightning with the ocean a boy was born whom Brahmadev named Jalandhar or Sea-seized." Jalandhar grew up to be a great conqueror, subdued the kings of the earth and married Vrinda, daughter of the demon Kalnemi. He engaged Siva in a fight on the slopes of the Kailas, but Siva could not defeat him so long as his wife, Vrinda, remained true to her husband. The gods were unhappy during the rule of Jalandhar. It was necessary to get rid of him at once, but they were unable to find the means to do it.

At last Vishnu hit upon a plan. He assumed the shape of Jalandhar and appeared before Vrinda. She fell a prey to this deception. As soon as she realized the truth, she cursed Vishnu and immolated herself. Siva's thunderbolts eliminated Jalandhar at the time. From the grave of Vrinda came out the *tulsi* plant.

In another story Narada was deputed by the gods either to bring Rukmini, the better-half of Krishna or gold same in quantity as Krishna's weight. The Queen preferred to supply gold equal to Krishna's weight. But no amount of gold could make the scales even, on one side of which Krishna sat. Meanwhile Rukmini came forward with a *tulsi* leaf and as soon as she placed the *tulsi* leaf on the pan the scale was even and on that day Krishna married the *tulsi* plant. *Tulsi* as love plant has also been described in Boccaccio's story in *Decameron* (iv 5) which was later popularised by John Keats in his poem *"Issabella, or the pot of basil."*

During the planting season, the unmarried youths who had been specially elected by the villagers and forced to undergo preliminary purification on the mountains taking with them wine and performed a sacrificial feast. Returning to the village with a branch, they placed it on a stone beside running water and sprinkled the blood of a goat upon it, while rejoicing villagers danced round it. After this every man was free to go home leaving the spring of cedar. On his arrival he

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* Slight modified version of this story appeared in B. L. Desai's "in Tree worship in Gujerat" pp. 45-55.—Ed.

could say to his wife. "If you want children, I have brought them to you ; if you want cattle, I have brought them : whatever you want I have it." *

A barren woman belonging to Tahoe tribe of "the Maoris had but to embrace a certain tree associated with the navel strings of definite mythical ancestors, to be certain of receiving a child." It is narrated in a Russian folktale that the husband goes into the forest, cuts wood and makes a cradle ; then his wife puts into it one of the logs he has cut, and begins swinging it, swinging the while a tune : "Swing, blockle dear, swing." After a little time the block begins to show a pair of legs, and the rejoicing woman swings the more until the block becomes a baby."[14]

The tree of Madavi or *Kurikkatti,* the Common Delight of the woods, would greet the dulcet music of charming woman with the blossoms. The *Elilai-Palai* or seven-leafed milk plant would easily reciprocate to woman's affection or show of friendship and get itself blossomed. A *Pathiri* or yellow-flowred fragrant trumpet-flower tree should be reviled and ridiculed by women to yield flowers. It is enough if a woman dines under its shade for *Makilam* (pointed-leaved Ape flowers, —*Mumusaps elangi*) to be covered with blossoms. The mere look of a woman would get flowers from the *Mara* or tree of *Sal.* A woman's kick would spring flowers on the Ashoke tree (*Saroca Indica*). A woman's embrace would produce flowers on the *Kura* or Bottle flower tree and her laughter would bring blossom to the Jasmine creepers. If a cocoanut, mango or tamarind tree had failed to prove floriferous and fruitful, the barren tree is beaten with a pestle on a day of eclipse and this method is believed to cure the tree of its barreness."[15]

We have considered here the intimate relationship between tree and fertility cult. From the aforesaid account we see some touching customs prevailing all over the world. The reader is requested to bear in mind that this article lays no claim on scholarship, independent research or original view. It has only culled and collated materials form sources not easily available to the readers.

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*. It is to be noted here that some rites and rituals on the fertility cult have also been referred to by K. N. Sahay and P. K. Mahapatra in their essays appeared elsewhere of this volume.—Ed.

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Appendix III

Amarendra Mukhopadhyay

A GLOSSARY OF BOTANICAL NAMES AND THEIR INDIAN SYNONYMS

I feel that a word of explanation is necessary as to how the glossary came to be compiled.

In such a vast country as India, where, according to the Linguistic Survey of India some 225 languages and dialects existed in 1901 and where no less than 146 languages and dialects exist now, any interest in probing into the minds of the people is generally baffling, since one's knowledge of language and dialects besides one's own is, we have to acknowledge, very very limited. Then, there happens to be no common language to facilitate communication and exchange, except through English. That too among about 20% of our entire population. The rest 80%, of whom a further 10% is considered "literate" since they can read and write *simple letters* in their own tongue, lies almost impenetrable. And this section comprises of what we call the "folk" and who are our source of folklore materials. To any serious student of folklore in India, therefore, the question of language poses an unsurmountable obstacle and full comprehension of the subject eludes him on account of it.

The same was the predicament for the present contributor, as also undoubtedly to a host of others, while going through the learned articles as they were featured in the "Folklore" from time to time.

To alleviate this difficulty somewhat, I suggested compiling a glossary of vernacular synonyms of trees and plants to the Editor and he was quick in his assent. The result is what follows.

Here fifty-seven trees and plants have been grouped in alphabetical order of their botanical names and their regional or local names have been given. Sanskrit names have also been incorporated. Botanical synonyms have been given in parenthesis. In spite of our best efforts, all the regional languages could not be represented here. The reason

being that our sources were limited and, secondly, all botanical specimens are not found everywhere. Thus, the reader may refer to the glossary for reference with regard to most of the trees and plants—not all—referred to in the different articles on tree-symbol worship.

If this modest love's labour of one reader helps another in the slightest way to appreciate a little more fully the romance of our botanical neighbours through myriads of folk-belief and customs, it will be an ample reward for one who shares with him the love of the Indian people and their quaint folklore.

Abutilon Asiatacum

Kanghi (Hindi) ; *Potari* (Bengali) ; *Khapat* (Gujerati) ; *Kangori* (Marathi) ; *Tutti* (Tamil) ; *Tutturubenda* (Telugu).

Acacia Arabica

Barbur (Sanskrit) ; *Babul, Kikar* (Hindi) ; *Babla* (Bengali) ; *Kikar* (Punjabi) ; *Babul, Baval* (Gujerati) ; *Karuvelam* (Tamil) ; *Nallatumma* (Telugu).

Aegle Marmelos

Bilva (Sanskrit) ; *Bel* (Hindi) ; *Bel* (Bengali) ; *Bili* (Gujerati) ; *Kuvala* (Malayalam) ; *Bel* (Marathi) ; *Villuvam* (Tamil) ; *Maredu* (Telugu).

Anthocephalus Cadamba
(Anthocephlus Indicus ; Nauclea Cadamba)

Kadamba (Sanskrit) ; *Kadamba* (Hindi) ; *Kadam* (Bengali) ; *Karma* (Oriya) ; *Kadamba* (Gujerati) ; *Vellai-cadamba* (Tamil) ; *Kadambamu* (Telugu) ; *Katambu* (Malayalam).

Artocarpus Integrifolia (Artocarpus Heterophyllus)

Panasa (Sanskrit) ; *Kathal* (Hindi) ; *Kanthal* (Bengali) ; *Phanas* (Marathi) ; *Pilapalam* (Tamil) ; *Pilavu* (Malayalam).

Azdirachra Indica (Melia Azdirachta)

Nimba (Sanskrit) ; *Nim* (Hindi) ; *Nim* (Bengali), *Limdo* (Gujerati) ;

Nim (Punjabi) ; *Vepa* (Tamil) ; *Vepa* (Telugu) ; *Arya-veppu* (Malayalam) ; *Nimb* (Kanarese).

Bassia Latifolia (Madhuca Indica)

Madhuka (Sanskrit) ; *Mahua* (Hindi) ; *Mahua* (Bengali) ; *Kattiluppai* (Tamil) ; *Madhukamu* (Telugu) ; *Irpachi, Irippa* (Malayalam).

Bauhinia Vahlii

Maljan, Jallur (Hindi) ; *Sihar, Chehur* (Bengali) ; *Adda* (Telugu) ; *Mohlain, Paur, Siadi* (Bastar Dt. M. P.).

Bauhinia Variegata

Kovidara (Sanskrit) ; *Kanchnar* (Hindi) ; *Rakta kanchan* (Bengali) ; *Segapu-manchori* (Tamil) ; *Mandara* (Telugu) ; *Ungoo* (Malayalam).

Benincasa Hispida (Benincasa Cerifera)

Brihatphala (Sanskrit), *Petha* (Hindi) ; *Chalkumra* (Bengali) ; *Chalkumra* (Punjabi) ; *Kohala* (Marathi) ; *Pushani kai* (Tamil) ; *Budidagummadi* (Telugu).

Betula Utilis (Betula Bhojpattra

Bhurjapatra (Sanskrit) ; *Bhujpatra* (Hindi) ; *Bhojpatra* (Bengali) ; *Bhojpatra* (Marathi) ; *Bhujapatri* (Telugu).

Borassus Flabellifer (Borassus Flabelliformis)

Tal (Sanskrit) ; *Tad* (Hindi) ; *Tal* (Bengali) ; *Tad* (Gujerati) ; *Tad* (Marathi) ; *Panai, Talai* (Tamil) ; *Tadu-chettu* (Telugu) ; *Pana, Karimpana* (Malayalam).

Butea Frondosa (Butea Monosperma)

Palas, Kimsuka (Sanskrit) ; *Dhak, Palas* (Hindi) ; *Palas* (Bengali) ; *Khakhaḍo* (Gujerati) ; *Palas* (Marathi) ; *Parasa* (Tamil) ; *Moduga* (Telugu) ; *Palasinsamatha, Plasu* (Malayalam).

Calotropis Gigantea

Arka (Sanskrit) ; *Ak* (Hindi) ; *Akanda* (Bengali) ; *Akanda* (Marathi) ;

Arkkam (Tamil) ; *Jilledu* (Telegu) ; *Erikku* (Malayalam) ; *Ekke gida* (Kanarese).

Cocos Nucifera

Narikel (Sanskrit) ; *Nariel* (Hindi) ; *Narikel, Narkel* (Bengali) ; *Nalieri* (Gujerati) ; *Narel* (Marathi) ; *Tenkai* (Tamil) ; *Narikelamu* (Telugu) ; *Tengu, Narikelam* (Malayalam).

Crateva Religiosa (Crateva Nurvala)

Varuna (Sanskrit) ; *Barun* (Hindi) ; *Barun* (Bengali) ; *Barna* (Punjabi) ; *Vayavarna* (Marathi) ; *Maralingam* (Tamil) ; *Magalingam* (Telugu) ; *Koovalam* (Malayalam).

Cucurbita Maxima

Sitaphal, Mithakaddu (Hindi)); *Bilati kumra* (Bengali) ; *Sakarkolu* (Gujerati) ; *Lal Bhopali* (Marathi) ; *Parangikayi* (Tamil) ; *Gummadi* (Telugu) ; *Mathan* (Malayalam).

Datura Stramonium (Datura Tatula)

Dhattura (Sanskrit) ; *Sada Dhutura* (Bengali) ; *Tattu dattura* (Punjabi) ; *Dhatura* (Gujerati) ; *Umtai* (Malayalam).

Dendrocalamus Strictus

Vansa (Sankrit) ; *Bans kaban* (Hindi) ; *Bans, Kanr* (Bengali) ; *Bas* (Marathi) ; *Kalmungil* (Tamil) ; *Sadanapa veduru* (Telugu) ; *Mula* (Malayalam).

Desmostachya Bipinnata
(Eragrostis Cynosuroides ; Poa Cynosuroides)

Darbha, Kush (Sanskrit) ; *Dab, Durba* (Hindi) ; *Kush* (Bengali) ; *Darba* (Gujerati) ; *Darbh* (Marathi) ; *Darbha* (Telugu).

Diospyros Melanoxylon

Dirghapatraka (Sanskrit) ; *Tendu* (Hindi) ; *Gab* (Bengali) ; *Kendu*

(Oriya) ; *Kend* (Oraon) ; *Tendu* (Marathi) ; *Karci, Tumbi* (Tamil) ; *Mancigata, Tumbi* (Telugu)

Erythrina Variegata (Erythrina Indica)

Mandar (Sanskrit) ; *Dadap* (Hindi) ; *Palte madar* (Bengali) ; *Pangara* (Marathi) ; *Kaliyanamurukku* (Tamil) ; *Badisa* (Telugu).

Euphorbia Tirucalli

Trikantaka (Sanskrit) ; *Konpal, Sehund* (Hindi) ; *Lanka sij, Tekata sij* (Bengali) ; *Kharsani* (Gujerati) ; *Shera* (Marathi) ; *Tirukalli, Kalli* (Tamil) ; *Chemudu* (Telugu).

Ficus Bengalensis (Ficus Indica)

Vata (Sanskrit) ; *Bor* (Hindi) ; *Bat* (Bengali) ; *Vad* (Gujerati) ; *Vada* (Marathi) ; *Bor* (Punjabi) ; *Pudavam* (Tamil) ; *Peddamatti* (Telugu) ; *Peral* (Malayalam) ; *Hiriyala* (Kanarese).

Ficus Glomerata (Ficus Racemosa)

Trayamana (Sanskrit) ; *Gular* (Hindi) ; *Dumur, Jagdumur* (Bengali) ; *Kumbal* (Punjabi) ; *Umbar* (Gujerati) ; *Datir* (Marathi) ; *Kodiyatti* (Tamil) ; *Buroni* (Telugu) ; *Vallitterakam* (Malayalam).

Ficus Lacor

Plaksha (Sanskrit) ; *Pilkhan* (Hindi) ; *Pakur* (Bengali) ; *Pilkhan* (*Punjabi*) ; *Pipli* (Marathi) ; *Kurugu* (Tamil) ; *Badijuvvi* (Telegu) ; *Pepar* (Malayalam).

Ficus Religiosa

Bodhi (Sanskrit) ; *Pipal* (Hindi) ; *Pipul, Asvattha* (Bengali) ; *Piplo* (Gujerati) ; *Mui Chitka* (Oraon) ; *Pipal* (Punjabi) ; *Arayal, Al* (Malayalam) ; *Arasu* (Tamil) ; *Pippali* (Telugu) ; *Pipal* (Marathi) ; *Arali* (Kanarese).

Helianthus Annuus

Suryamukhi (Sanskrit) ; *Suryamukhi* (Hindi) ; *Surjamukhi* (Bengali) ; *Surajmaki* (Marathi) ; *Suriyakandi* (Tamil) ; *Adiyabhaktichettu* (Telugu).

Hibiscus Rosa-Sinensis

Od (Sanskrit) ; *Jasum, Gudahul* (Hindi) ; *Rakta-jaba* (Bengali) ; *Jasabanda* (Marathi) ; *Sapattuppu* (Tamil) ; *Dasanamu* (Telegu).

Hibiscus Tiliaceus

Bala (Sanskrit) ; *Chelwa* (Bengali) ; *Bellipata* (Marathi) ; *Nirpparutti* (Tamil) ; *Ettagogu* (Telugu).

Lagenaria Siceraria (Lagenaria Vulgaris)

Alabu (Sanskrit) ; *Bogalao* (Assamese) ; *Lauki, Kadutumbi, Kashiphal, Kaddu* (Hindi) ; *Lau, Kodu* (Bengali) ; *Lauki* (Punjabi) ; *Kadubhopla* (Marathi) ; *Shorakkai* (Tamil) ; *Sorakaya* (Telugu).

Luffa Cylindrica (Luffa Aegyptiaca)

Rajakoshataki (Sanskrit) ; *Ghiatarui, Nenua* (Hindi) ; *Dhundhul* (Bengali) ; *Ghosali* (Marathi) ; *Pikku, Tureippirku* (Tamil) ; *Guttibira* (Telugu).

Mangifera Indica

Amra (Sanskrit) ; *Am* (Hindi) ; *Am* (Bengali) ; *Ambo* (Gujerati) ; *Mamaram* (Tamil) ; *Amramu* (Telugu) ; *Mavu, Amram* (Malayalam).

Michelia Champaca

Champaka (Sanskrit);; *Champaka* (Hindi) ; *Champa* (Bengali) ; *Champo* (Gujerati) ; *Kudchampa* (Marathi) ; *Shampangi* (Tamil) ; *Champakamu* (Telugu) ; *Champakam* (Malayalam).

Mimusops Elangi

Bakula (Sanskrit) ; *Bakul* (Hindi) ; *Bakul* (Bengali) ; *Borsali* (Mara-

thi) ; *Maulsari* (Punjab) ; *Magilam* (Tamil) ; *Vakulamu* (Telugu) ; *Ilanji, Bakulam* (Malayalam).

Mormordica Charantia

Sushavi, Karvelli (Sanskrit) ; *Kakral* (Assamese) ; *Karela* (Hindi) ; *Karala* (Bengali) ; *Karela* (Punjabi) ; *Karla* (Gujerati) ; *Pavakkachedi, Pagel* (Tamil) ; *Kakara* (Telugu) ; *Kappakka* (Malayalam).

Musa Sapientum (Musa Paradisiaca)

Kadali (Sanskrit) ; *Kela* (Hindi) ; *Kala* (Bengali) ; *Kadali* (Tamil) ; *Kadali* (Telugu) ; *Kadalam* (Malayalam).

Nerium Oleander (Nerium Odorum)

Karavira (Sanskrit) ; *Kaner* (Hindi) ; *Karabi* (Bengali) ; *Kaner* (Punjabi) ; *Karen* (Gujerati) ; *Kanhera* (Marathi) ; *Karaviram* (Tamil) ; *Karaviram* (Telugu) ; *Karaviram* (Malayalam).

Ocimum Basilicum

Munjariki (Sanskrit) ; *Babui Tulsi* (Hindi) ; *Babui Tulsi* (Bengali) ; *Babri* (Punjabi) ; *Sabza* (Marathi) ; *Tirnupatchi* (Tamil) ; *Bhutulasi* (Telugu) ; *Tirunitru* (Malayalam).

Ocimum Sanctum

Tulsi (Sanskrit) ; *Tulsi* (Hindi) ; *Tulsi* (Bengali) ; *Tulsi* (Gujerati) ; *Tulasa* (Marathi) ; *Tulsi* (Malayalam).

Pandanus Odoratissimus (Pandanus Tectorius)

Kebika, Ketaki (Sanskrit) ; *Kevada* (Hindi) ; *Kyaora, Keya* (Bengali) ; *Kevada* (Gujerati) ; *Keura* (Marathi) ; *Talhai* (Tamil) ; *Ketaki Tulasa* (Marathi) ; *Tulsi* (Malayalam).

Phyllanthus Emblica (Emblica Officinalis)

Amlaka (Sanskrit) ; *Amla, Aonla* (Hindi) ; *Amlaki* (Bengali) ; *Amlaka* (Kanarese) ; *Nelli* (Tamil) ; *Nelli* (Malayalam) ; *Amalakamu* (Telugu).

Polyalthea Longifolia

Devdaru (Bengali) ; *Asopalav* (Gujerati) ; *Asoka* (Marathi) ; *Putrajivi* (Kanarese) ; *Asogam, Nettilingam* (Tamil) ; *Asokamu* (Telugu) ; *Ashokam* (Malayalam).

Prosopis Spicigera

Sami (Sanskrit) ; *Jhand* (Hindi) ; *Shami* (Bengali) ; *Jand* (Punjabi) ; *Kalisam* (Tamil) ; *Jammi* (Telugu) ; *Parampu, Vanni* (Malayalam).

Pterocarpus Indicus

Honne (Kanarese) ; *Vengai* (Tamil) ; *Ettavegisa* (Telugu) ; *Kanikonna* (Malayalam).

Salmalia Malabarica (Bombax Malabaricum)

Salmali (Sanskrit) ; *Simbar* (Hindi) ; *Simul* (Bengali) ; *Semul* (Marathi) ; *Purani* (Tamil) ; *Salmali* (Telugu) ; *Mocha* (Malayalam).

Santalum Album

Chandana (Sanskrit) ; *Safed chandan* (Hindi) ; *Svetchandan* (Bengali) ; *Chandan* (Punjabi) ; *Chandan* (Gujerati) ; *Chanāan* (Marathi) ; *Chandana* (Kanarese) ; *Ingam* (Tamil) ; *Chandanamu* (Telugu) ; *Chandanam* (Malayalam).

Sarcosttemma Acidum (Sarcostemma Brevistigma)

Soma (Sanskrit) ; *Somalata* (Hindi) ; *Somalata* (Bengali) ; *Soma* (Marathi) ; *Sommam* (Tamil) ; *Kondapala* (Telugu) ; *Somam* (Malayayam).

Semecarpus Anacardium

Bhallika (Sanskrit) ; *Bhelwa, Bhilawa* (Hindi) ; *Bhela* (Bengali) ; *Bhilawa* (Punjabi) ; *Biba* (Marathi) ; *Serangottai* (Tamil) ; *Bhallatamu* (Telugu) ; *Temprakku* (Malayalam).

Shorea Robusta

Sala (Sanskrit) ; *Sal* (Hindi) ; *Sal* (Bengali) ; *Sal* (Punjabi) ; *Sal* (Marathi) ; *Kungiliyam* (Tamil) ; *Sarjakamu* (Telugu) ; *Mulappumarutu* (Malayalam).

Sorghum Vulgare

Dirghmala (Sanskrit) ; *Jowar* (Hindi) ; *Joar* (Bengali) ; *Jowar*

(Gujerati) ; *Jowar* (Marathi) ; *Jolah* (Kanarese) ; *Cholam* (Tamil) ; *Jonnalu* (Telugu) ; *Chavela* (Malayalam).

SPHAERANTHUS INDICUS

Mundirika (Sanskrit) ; *Mundi* (Hindi) ; *Murmuria* (Bengali) ; *Gorakhmundi* (Marathi) ; *Kottakkarandai* (Tamil) ; *Bodasoram* (Telugu) ; *Atakkamaniyan* (Malayalam).

SPONDIAS MANGIFERA (SPONIDAS PINNATA)

Amrataka (Sanskrit) ; *Amra* (Hindi) ; *Amra* (Bengali) ; *Amra* (Marathi) ; *Ambate* (Kanarese) ; *Mambulichi* (Tamil) ; *Amratakamu* (Telugu) ; *Ampazham* (Malayalam).

STRYCHNOS NUX VOMICA

Visha-mushti (Sanskrit) ; *Kuchla* (Hindi) ; *Kunchila* (Bengali) ; *Kuchila* (Punjabi) ; *Kajra* (Marathi) ; *Kanjira* (Kanarese) ; *Etti* (Tamil) ; *Mushti* (Telugu) ; *Kanjiram* (Malayalam).

TAMARINDUS INDICA

Tintrini (Sanskrit) ; *Imli* (Hindi) ; *Tentul* (Bengali) ; *Ambli* (Gujerati) ; *Amilam* (Tamil) ; *Amlika* (Telugu) ; *Amlam, Puli* (Malayalam); *Hunise* (Kanarese).

VITEX NEGUNDO

Nirgundi (Sanskrit); *Nirgandi* (Hindi); *Nishinda* (Bengali); *Nirgundi* (Marathi) ; *Niragundi* (Kanarese) ; *Vennochi* (Tamil) ; *Nallavavili* (Telugu) ; *Vennochi* (Malayalam).

WITHANIA COAGULANS (PHYSALIS FLEXUOSA)

Ashvakandika (Sanskrit) ; *Asvagandha* (Bengali) ; *Asgand* (Hindi) ; *Asgand* (Punjabi) ; *Asvagandha* (Marathi) ; *Amangura* (Kanarese) ; *Amukkira* (Tamil) ; *Vajigandha* (Telugu) ; *Amukkiram, Vetti* (Malayalam).

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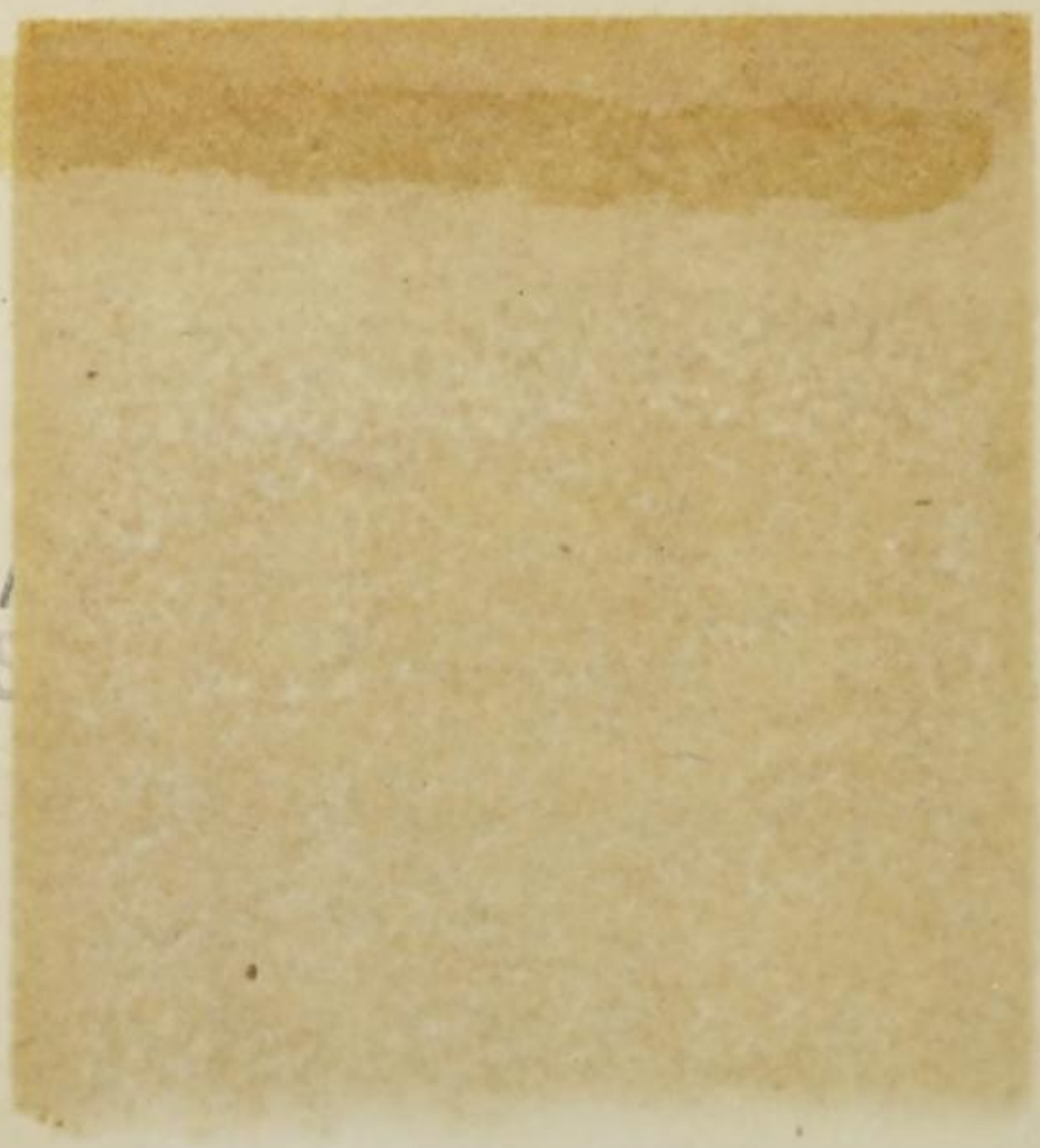

A New Survey Of A Pattern Of Folk-Religion

TREE SYMBOL WORSHIP IN INDIA

FOREWORD : SRI PRAFULLACHANDRA SEN, Chief Minister, West Bengal.
PREFACE : MADAME SOPHIA WADIA, President, Indian Folklore Society.

Edited With An Introduction *BY* SRI SANKAR SEN GUPTA.

It is believed that there is a definite set of problems common to the humanity and to the various aspects of social sciences. This belief is based upon the evident interaction that occurs in every society between cultural tradition, social organisation, religious pattern and new ideas, new aspirations & new wants. It is the character of the specialists to mark out territory of their own that touches on such interaction. They multiply special problems in special language. Here is a volume of essays that will speak of this aspect of human history. It makes available to the students, the specialists, the serious readers the essence of scientific thinking on the pattern of tree symbol worship in the perspective of social and general psychology, sociology, linguistics, folklorology, cultural and social anthropology.

The contributors of this book are regarded as authorities ; they have made the task of writing for the general readers challenging. Some of them have chanted the general trends and discipline of the tree-worship, others have confined themselves to some aspect of theoretical discussions. Some others have integrated the findings of their disciplines in their own framework which may lack formal measurement. Yet personal viewpoints in any complex scene differ inevitably when the editor acted as a liaison force.

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